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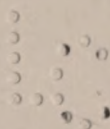
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Charlotte von Cosel

BY THE TRANSLATOR

OF

"OVER YONDER," "MAGDALENA," "THE OLD COUNTESS," ETC.



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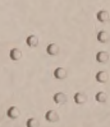
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IT IS THE FASHION.

INTRODUCTION.

THE winter sun shone cheerily into the Count of Düsterloh's study, and gilded the towers which lent to his castle the appearance of a feudal stronghold. The old man was leaning back comfortably in his arm-chair; his fresh complexion, and the bright eyes resting with evident interest on the pages of the book in his hand, seemed almost incompatible with the silver hair, that spoke of many departed years, and of a longer winter than that which spread its snowy mantle over the fields and woods. Unfortunately, there were other signs of advancing age,—signs that told of enfeebled powers. The old man's feet were carefully enveloped, and rested upon a soft cushion; and the crutch-stick leaning against his arm-chair showed that their support was not to be depended upon. Everything was arranged with evident regard to this infirmity. All that could serve to amuse a lonely hour, or to make it pass more swiftly, was placed within his reach. A table covered with books and charts, and another with writing-materials, stood beside him. The fire, always in itself an interesting, as well as a cheerful, object, was within reach,

and close at hand stood a wood-basket, containing sufficient fuel to bid defiance to the most sunless day of winter; and, finally, just at the Count's side was the bell-rope, to summon, should he so desire, the servants waiting in the ante-room. He was, however, so absorbed in his book that he seemed to have forgotten everything else; the fire was rapidly dying out, and he at last mechanically felt for the poker to stir it to a flame, but grasped his crutch-stick instead, and was only conscious of the mistake when the sound of a carriage stopping before the door recalled his attention to the outer world. He rang, and a servant appeared.

"Who was that?" he asked.

"Fräulein Hildegard," was the reply.

The old man's face brightened.

"Ask her to come at once to me; and then order coffee," he said.

He raised himself with difficulty, and, supported by the stick, was hastening to welcome the new-comer, when she appeared in the door-way, and, without stopping to remove her wrappings, forced him back to his seat with gentle violence.

"That is contrary to our agreement," she said, reproachfully. "I am to come and go when and how I will, and you are to notice me no more than the air which steals through your open door——"

"No, that is not the way," interrupted the Count. "Against the winter wind I would close the door; but the gentle breath of spring," he added, with a courtly gallantry that became him well, "*that* I

welcome! Welcome, then, Fräulein Hildegard, to the cloister of the recluse."

The lady placed her hand in the one extended to her, laughing, as she did so, at the compliment.

"A fine representative I am of the 'gentle breath of spring'!" she said. "Look, I have one wrapping on over another, like a bulbous root,—but not a flower-bulb—for I don't know to what class of flowers a poor crooked old maid can belong. No, no! I have done!" she cried, hastily, in answer to the Count's half-pitying, half-disapproving glance. "I know that you always enter the lists for me, and I dare not, in your presence, add to my thirty years the ten more that I consider my hump-back equivalent to. When you are by, I always speak of it as 'my little affliction.' Indeed, the years are past long ago in which it used to be a *great* affliction to me."

So she chattered on gayly, as she removed her wrappings, and at last, drawing a chair towards the fire, sat down.

"It is always so nice and comfortable here," she said, rubbing her hands. "I want to try to arrange my home—though it will not be on *quite* so grand a scale—after your pattern."

He looked at her anxiously.

"You have decided, then?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "I took your advice, and did not do so in the first burst of excitement and without adequate thought. I took six months to think it over, and now, after due consideration, I *have* decided."

"On what?" he asked.

"On being my own mistress," she replied, quickly.

"So you too are seized with the modern emancipation-fever!" he answered. "Well, you only follow the prevailing fashion."

"I concern myself little enough as to what is fashionable or unfashionable," she said, "and never did pay any attention to such things, even when I lived in closer connection with the world. I follow natural impulses; and, if you think over my past, you will understand my longings for a free will, for independent action, and for an untrammelled life; now that I am at last at liberty to gratify my long-suppressed wishes, I feel, for the first time, how powerful they have become."

She ceased. The Count, too, was silent, and gazed thoughtfully on the face over which the shadows of the past and the light of newly-awakened hopes of a brighter future chased each other in rapid alternation. The face was not young, nor fair, and yet it was well worthy of contemplation. The refined features and speaking expression attracted the observer in spite of himself. The eyes were of a lovely light-brown color, and their clear, open gaze told of the mind's firm mastery over a sensitive, passionate nature. The rather delicate look, an almost invariable accompaniment of any bodily deformity, in this case imparted rather a touching than a painful expression, and vanished entirely when, as was often the case, the lips parted in a sunny smile. It was only necessary to see that smile to feel sure that through all the vicis-

situdes of life Hildegard would remain cheerful and contented, and would not be very deeply wounded by any satirical spirits that happened to cross her path. She was tall and slender, and of noble bearing; and through the numerous wrappings which concealed rather than defined her figure, one rather guessed than perceived its irregularity. At last the Count spoke.

“It really pains me to hear you speak so lightly of your——” He stopped short.

“Deformity,” supplied Hildegard.

“Of your undeserved misfortune,” continued the Count, earnestly.

“You suppose that the light manner is assumed to conceal real sensitiveness?” she interrupted. “That is not the case, I assure you. It is rather a sort of resentment against fate. There are so many straight backs in the world;—why should mine have been made crooked? I often ask myself this, but it is such an absurd question that I laugh at myself for it a moment afterwards. So you see I am thoroughly accustomed to be ridiculed. It should not pain others, for it does not pain me; but I must confess that I never could understand my late uncle’s idea,—that it was given me as a shield against vanity. However, it makes little difference how I came by it. I have it; that is enough. I shall know all about it one day,—just as I suppose my uncle knows now why he had such a red nose; though I think he could have found out the cause of *that*, even in *this* world. Well, it has been ten long years since he went to his rest! Peace to his ashes, and honor to his moral

axioms, although he never proved his rules by example."

The servant brought in coffee; Hildegard prepared it for the old gentleman, and handed it to him.

"It is the last time," she said; and her voice trembled.

He looked up, startled at her words.

"The time has expired; and the house, sold after the death of my aunt, in accordance with my uncle's will, must now be resigned to its new owner; I can remain there no longer. This sale is an example of the arbitrariness which has tainted my whole life. I am the heiress. Why not allow me to dispose of my own property? What difference could it make to my uncle whether I had the land itself, or the money for it? This earth seems more of a home when we possess a portion of it, no matter how small. I should not have lived there, probably, but it would have been mine, nevertheless, and I might have kept it as an asylum for my old age."

"And whither are you going now?" asked the Count.

"To the capital," replied Hildegard.

"So far away?" said the old man, with a sigh. "I was in hopes you would remain at least in the vicinity, and continue to cheer up your old friend, who gets the blues here all by himself."

"You won't get the blues," said Hildegard, reassuringly.

"No; but the blues will get me," jested the Count: "they circle around me often in gloomy swarms,

darkening the air and obscuring the blessed sunshine."

"Where do they come from?" asked Hildegard.

"Generally from the past," answered the Count. "They whisper to me of what is gone, but not forgotten. Your presence is the mightiest spell against their dark enchantments; your bright eyes, your glad voice, your cheerful manner, drive away the saddening memories; but to hear you speak in that mocking way of your affliction strikes upon me like a keen sword upon an open wound."

Hildegard was amazed at the deep earnestness of his manner.

"Have you never been told the cause of your misfortune?" continued the Count.

"Oh, yes," she replied; "but it made little impression upon me. It was not the poor man's fault. He was only playing with me, and was riding me on his shoulder. I must have been a bold child for my age,—only three years old,—for I rode my self-constituted steed with whip and spur. If I proved stronger than he anticipated, and, slipping from his arms, fell and dislocated my shoulder, it was his fault as little as it was mine. I believe in predestination in such things. God had intended me to be crook-backed; and the decree does not seem to me nearly so hard on the actual sufferer as on the guiltless instrument."

"Hildegard," said the Count, "it was I;—I was the man."

Astonishment rendered her silent.

"I met with your parents while on a journey," he continued. "We were not at first acquainted, but, meeting frequently, at last made friends, and often congratulated ourselves on having done so. Your parents were a noble pair——"

Hildegard's eyes glistened.

"Your father of brilliant mind, and your mother the picture of happiness, they seemed two of Fortune's prime favorites. They had been visiting relatives, and were returning home with you, Hildegard, the brightest, most amusing, and most irrepressible child I ever saw. Through you, as often happens, our acquaintance began. In winning the children's hearts, we often win those of the parents. I wish I had never seen you, Hildegard; but from the moment I met you, years ago, for the first time since that terrible day, I have felt as though I never ought to let you go out of my sight again."

"And so it was all on account of my hump-back, when I was ascribing it solely to my own charms?"

"Is that all you say when I tell you that I was the cause of your misfortune?"

"Not all; I am not unfortunate, and never was, that I can remember; for the greatest misfortune of all—the loss of my parents—came upon me at so early an age that the pain was only a momentary one, a sort of half-comprehended terror. What my loss had been I understood better, later; but then the bond was loosed, the agony over, and two saint-like images were enshrined in my soul; to them I fled for refuge when the world seemed dark

and cruel. The memory of my parents is to me a star. That star is in the heaven above me ; I cannot possess it upon earth, but I know that its tender light falls upon my path, that no earthly stain can sully its purity, and that one day I, too, will rise to those heavenly heights."

The old man took her hand in deep emotion.

"Then you forgive me?" he asked.

"My kind, good friend," she cried, eagerly, "I have almost a tender feeling for 'my little misfortune,' now that I know its cause; but it really will grow a heavy burden if you look at me with such sorrowful eyes. As far back as I can remember, my parents always spoke of my mishap as a decree of Heaven. Later, I learned how I had received it, from my old Caroline; but even she did not know your name. She came into our service after the accident, and had never heard the name of its author. Let the story be buried with my parents. If that be one of your 'sad remembrances,' pray throw it into the fire the next time it comes to annoy you. It deserves no better fate. I think, though, that it is rather the gout that is the true cause of your troubles, my dear, kind friend; we are so unwilling to acknowledge physical suffering, and so gladly persuade ourselves that it is mental."

"When do you leave?" asked the Count, absently.

"To-day," she replied. "My baggage is gone already. Herr von Z——, who purchased the house, was kind enough to lend me his carriage to convey me to the next town; thence, I go by extra post

to C——, remain there overnight, and early next morning take the first train for the capital. Caroline is already there, arranging my apartments. You see that I have every prospect for a comfortable journey, and, besides, will probably be very pleasantly situated, as I have already made arrangements to share the home of a family there. A President von Löben——”

“Von Löben?” interrupted the Count.

“Yes; do you know him?”

“No; there are many of the name.”

“Well,” continued she, “President von Löben, who, with his family, occupies the first floor of a delightful house in a central situation, is anxious to dispose of some of his superfluous rooms. I read the advertisement, commenced a correspondence with Frau von Löben, who seems a very intelligent and pleasant woman, and we soon arranged the terms. I am to have two rooms, a sleeping-cabinet, and a chamber for my servant, on the same floor with my hostess. Will not I be delightfully situated?”

“And then?” asked the Count.

“Yes, and then! I must wait and see what comes *then*. I have provided myself with a home, and with one that seems to offer me every prospect of happiness. The rest I leave to fate.”

The Count shook his head. “It is a bold undertaking,” he said, “to go—a single woman—into a large, strange city, with no one to advise you, help you, or smooth your path.”

“That is precisely what I wish: I want to be myself, and not the mere reflection of another. I want

to tread my own road, and not follow in the footprints of others. Think of my past life, and you will find this only natural."

"Truly, you *have* had a hard life," he answered. "It must have been a heavy trial to pass so many years at the bedside of a sick old woman,—fretful, suffering, and incapable of any consideration for others. Had I not remembered this, I would have begged you to accept a home here with me; but then you would only have exchanged one hospital for another, and I was not selfish enough to make the offer."

"It was not that," replied Hildegard, thanking the Count with a grateful look. "Those were far from being my bitterest hours; for it was a duty to which love and gratitude both called me. But my whole life long I have been doomed to submission; whereas I am conscious of a strong and decided will of my own. I was never allowed to do as I wished, nor to learn what I had natural talent for; my tastes were never consulted, my opinions never regarded. Did my heart draw me to the right, I was sure to be forced towards the left; did I long for light, it was extinguished before my very eyes; did I want to wear green, blue was at once put on me; did I especially love any one, and long for his or her society, I was forced into association with another: mentally and bodily I was kept in thralldom. For years I had to endure the unnecessary suffering of an orthopedic establishment (my relatives meant it kindly, no doubt, though my parents, I am sure,

would never have sent me there), and I grew none the straighter for it. When I left there, it was only exchanging a physical stretcher for a mental one, and it is a blessing that I was not rendered a moral cripple thereby. I was handed about, as it were, from one relative to another. When I look back on it all, it seems to me as though Fate had amused herself by tossing me, like a football, from this one to that one. The opinions, habits, and wishes of each new family were different from those of the last, and each strove to make me conform to their own particular ideas. I know that I can obey, and can accommodate myself to the wills of others. I have done it all my life. *Now* I will see how it feels to have my own way. They all told me that this restraint was for my good; *that* I never could appreciate. Now I will seek happiness after my own fashion, and I will see if it is not better to let it come to me of its own accord, than to be dragged to it by leading-strings. You know when we go from tailor to tailor, and none can suit us, we end by making the garment ourselves——”

“And often end by adopting that which is totally unbecoming,” interrupted the Count, quickly.

“Unbecoming?” she repeated. “Do you see anything unbecoming in my intentions?”

“No, indeed! I place you entirely beyond the usual pale of conventionalities. You are neither so young nor so inexperienced as to require a companion or a counselor; but you are unused to a lonely home.”

“Can I be more lonely than I was by the sick-bed

of my aunt? I have long been accustomed to loneliness and bondage, so now I will try loneliness and freedom. You are lonely yourself, for that matter," she continued, pointing to the table covered with books; "but do you feel solitary or deserted?"

"I am a man," he replied. "A woman's happiness consists of far different elements. But I am a fool to wish to dissuade you. When I look into your clear, truthful eyes, and think over your past life, I feel sure that you will come to a right conclusion, even though you reach it by a circuitous route; your nature is too noble a one for you ever to live solely for yourself. Do not take the life of an old bachelor, who has unconsciously grown to do so, for your pattern."

"You live for your inferiors," said Hildegard, somewhat struck by his words. "And you *have* lived for your country."

"I have lived for many things outside my own home," interrupted the Count, "but when there I am solitary, and live only to and for myself."

Hildegard sat silent, as if weighing his words.

"But what else can I do?" she at last exclaimed. "I can make myself no other home, predestined as I am to a lonely pilgrimage through life. I cannot," she pursued, jestingly, noticing the sudden cloud on the face of her old friend,— "I cannot go and choose a husband from among the young men of the surrounding country; and if one chose *me*, could only say, 'My dear friend, you are certainly either blind or crazy, and I must respectfully decline.' What, then, is a

poor, lonely woman to do, except to seize gratefully such selfish pleasures as remain to her? No, don't answer. All my life, I have seen more preaching than practicing, and I find, in this case, the same fault with you. Why are you unmarried? A man can take the initiative, and has the right of siege, denied us women; and you,—a high-born, rich, and respected young man, and, unless age flatters you, certainly a very handsome one,—you seem to have been destined to victory by nature and by fate. Then why are you unmarried?"

"Because, although I had the right of siege, as you call it, that siege was unsuccessful,—at least when the victory was of any value to me," replied the Count, sadly, "and because I had an enemy who, by intrigue and subtlety, glided through byways to the goal, and, finally, because, looking back in the light of calmer thought, I see that I was too romantic. I could not forget my first love, or make that in which the voice of the heart should be supreme, an affair of cold worldly calculation. That is why I am an old bachelor, why I shall die as I have lived,—alone. When I am gone, strangers will enjoy the fruit of my labors, without a thought of thankful remembrance for him who wasted his whole existence, and threw away life's sweetest happiness, only to make richer ungrateful heirs. That is the curse of the solitary, and that curse has fallen on me. Don't look so sorrowful, my child; you see I bear my lot resignedly. I don't think you ever saw me gloomy or depressed. Truly, the shadow on my soul grows darker as my

sun sinks towards the west. Very few warm, bright rays fall now into my home, and of those few you will bear away the brightest with you. But I do not blame you, for you are still mounting upwards, whilst I am fast going down-hill."

"Have you no near relations?" asked Hildegard, sympathizingly.

"No," he answered, briefly.

"Had you no brothers nor sisters?"

"I had one sister, but she died long ago," he answered, in a somewhat constrained manner. "When I die, a smiling heir will stand beside my coffin. If Düsterloh were not entailed, and the disposition of it lay in my own hands, I should be tempted to pass over my relations and let the rights of true friendship take precedence of those of mere blood. It would be a sort of compensation for the misfortune I innocently caused you, if I could make you mistress of Düsterloh."

"Thank Heaven that it cannot be so!" she cried; "that would be too heavy a responsibility for a woman's weak shoulders."

"You are right," he answered. "You are in the happy position of having sufficient. More than that brings care rather than pleasure. I find your feelings only natural. So we must have the laughing heirs, after all."

"But I hope that both you and I will laugh for many a long year before their turn comes," said Hildegard; "and when we have done, they will be welcome to their inheritance without the shadow of

bereavement. I shall claim that as *my* right; and among the loving hearts that cherish your memory, mine will not be wanting."

She spoke heartily, but without a trace of sentimentality. She had struck the right chord, for the Count's face cleared, and its usual cheerful, untroubled expression returned. An hour passed in pleasant conversation. When the carriage drove up, they both became grave, it is true, but there was none of that tearful sadness which robs the spirit of all elasticity and prevents us from looking past the sorrowful parting to the joyful reunion.

"Will you do me one favor?" said the Count. "Will you write to me?"

She nodded, assentingly.

"No beautifully-composed, graceful epistles, remember, but an honest record of your thoughts as they arise."

"Certainly; but suppose I naturally write a 'beautifully-composed, graceful epistle'? How then?"

"Whatever is natural to you, that do," he replied, laughing, "and I will promise to be satisfied. Only, remember that your letters are to supply your place. I want to be able to fancy myself once more with you."

"I will do it; though it would flatter me more to think that my place could not be supplied," she answered.

"And you will not ask me to write to you in return?" he said. "I could tell you little, though, except that I still live; *how* I live you know,—there

will be nothing in that to tell. So, till you hear of my death, believe that I am still alive, and, till you find better friends, look upon me as your best."

"I wish no better one," she answered, heartily, "and will gladly give you my full confidence. So I will write, as you wish, and tell you all I do, and all I think, without caring whether it be wise or foolish."

"Agreed!" said the Count, grasping her hand. "And now, Heaven guard and guide you through all the crooked paths of this troublesome world! Will you be rightly understood, I wonder?" he continued, looking deeply into her eyes. "You leave your solitude and seek a crowd; see that you be not rudely jostled."

"Oh, I will jostle in return," she answered.

"Do not think everybody as honest as yourself," continued the Count. "Be careful in the expression of your opinions: of one hundred people, ninety-nine are unwilling to hear the truth, and the hundredth wishes it dressed up carefully. Don't jest before those that cannot understand you,—it would be wilfully slandering your own noble nature; be not deceived by sudden professions of friendship; in this world, the new——"

"Stop! stop!" cried Hildegard. "I beg ten thousand pardons, my beloved friend, but there come the old leading-strings back again! Let me seek for myself, if there be anything to find, and I be not too dull to find it. Thank you, many times, for your fatherly advice, but I am such an old child now that I can learn nothing by word of mouth,—I must have

the book and see for myself. That seems being very rude, doesn't it?—one of the things you warned me against; for in this world sound is everything. My dear Count, when old friends misunderstand me, it goes to my heart, but being misunderstood by other people is a matter of perfect indifference to me. And now, good-by! till we meet again,—happily and soon."

The servant stood by with her furred mantle; she put it on, refusing the Count's assistance.

"Before you hand Fräulein Hildegard to the carriage, move my chair to the window," said he to the attendant. It was done; another "farewell,"—a last greeting,—and she quitted the room. A moment afterwards, the carriage rolled away. The Count, from his window, followed it with his eyes until a turn in the road made it disappear. Then, leaning back, he covered his eyes with his hand, although the sun was low in the horizon, and clouds obscured its beams.

FIRST LETTER.

HILDEGARD VON SCHÖNERBRUNN TO COUNT DÜSTERLOH.

HERE I sit in my new home, my mind filled with a thousand fresh thoughts and impressions, but I am nevertheless at heart the same old Hildegard, and, wandering back in spirit to the old home, almost forget the new one, of which I have promised to tell you. First, though, about my journey. Until I came to the depot, I did not appreciate my loneliness; but suddenly, in the wearying crowd,—the motley assemblage,—it came upon me with overpowering force. Ladies without escorts are especially dependent on their good luck, and on the courtesy of their fellow-travelers. I was spared the numerous bundles and the deafening chatter of the “ladies’ car,” for a universal cry greeted me as I opened the door:

“Another person! and we are so crowded already! There’s not room for one more! Well, we’ll have to move closer together.”

Seeing that I was expected to clamber over the mass of crinoline into the farthest corner of the car, I expressed, by a silent bow, my recognition of the occupants’ politeness, and then, turning to the guard, gained his good will by a few kindly words and a more substantial argument. He led me to another

car, in which were seated two gentlemen, or rather one gentleman and one youth of about sixteen. The latter sat just before the entrance, and had his feet on the opposite seat, and a traveling-shawl spread over his knees.

"This is not the ladies' car!" he exclaimed, on seeing me. I silently acknowledged the fact, and put my foot on the first step, while the guard explained that the ladies' car was full.

"Smoking is allowed here!" he cried to me again.

"And gymnastics, too?" I asked, glancing at his legs, which he kept extended like a barrier before the door, and over which I would have been compelled to jump in order to enter the coach.

"Joachim!" said the other young man, in a low voice, but with emphasis, looking reprovingly at the lad. The latter flushed, shook his beautiful curls, and moved his feet. I entered, and sat down in the farthest corner, gave a quick glance at my traveling-companions, and drew my own conclusions. Undoubtedly they were brothers. The elder was about twenty-three or twenty-four years old. His face was a pleasant and an attractive one, although there was nothing particularly striking about it, and it was difficult to say wherein lay its charm. The younger was beautiful as a picture. His eyes sparkled with life and animation, his countenance was frank and open, but the lips bore an almost defiant expression, and the whole air was bold almost to impudence, of which useful and prevalent quality, judging both from face and manner, I attributed to him a very considerable share. A handsome, though singular,

traveling-costume,—half artistic, half foppish,—and an elegant pocket-book, on which a crest was stamped, and which he drew out on all occasions, contrasted, and yet harmonized oddly, with the childishness of its owner, which *would* betray itself in spite of his assumption of age.

I am not usually very intolerant towards spoiled children. I look upon their ill behavior as a sort of children's disease, which must be passed through, like measles or whooping-cough. "Children will be children," says the proverb. This is one of mother Nature's arrangements, I suppose. My young neighbor was suffering from the severest type of the disease; at least so I judged from his ceaseless chatter. I was much entertained by it, as well as by his brother's imperturbably good-humored efforts to repress him. But they were useless; the little fellow was like a ball, rebounding only the higher for the force with which he was flung down. A noble gift, this elasticity of spirit, like a sparkling fountain leaping and casting its brilliant drops high into the air. No matter whence it spring,—whether from natural hopefulness of disposition, from the high spirits of youth, from self-confidence, or from mere arrogance,—it is a goodly gift, a sort of energy, and, when bridled and led, can be made most serviceable.

I learned from the conversation that the younger was a "*Gymnasiast*." He spoke of the examination in the coming fall as "mere child's play," was anticipating Heidelberg, and certainly seemed thoroughly at home in "student language," for every third word

was "*kneipen*." From time to time his eyes strayed to me, inquisitively, and, unable to guess from my indifferent mien in what class of society to place me, he threw out, occasionally, remarks, not actually addressed to me, but calculated, as he thought, to draw forth a retort. But I was not to be tempted. Still, his unfortunate age urged him on.

We stopped, at last, at a station, and his brother had gone into the restaurant, when he suddenly exclaimed, as if to himself,—

"What a number of ladies are getting out! The ladies' car must certainly be almost empty. But perhaps you prefer traveling with gentlemen?" he continued, suddenly turning to me. "I have often heard that ladies prefer the gentlemen's car."

"I travel where I can find a seat," I replied, "and when I have found a seat, there I stay: that information will perhaps spare you further remarks on the subject of the ladies' car."

He looked rather confused, and stammered out that he had meant that he supposed I would find ladies' company more agreeable.

"It is always possible to be alone on a journey, even in a crowd," I answered. "Consequently, my companions give me little concern. It doesn't even cause me annoyance—nay, it rather amuses me—to travel with spoiled children, so long as they are not my own."

He bit his lips.

"Has madame any family?" he asked, suddenly, in the affected accents of an exquisite.

I could scarcely keep my countenance, so absurd was the change of manner; but I was spared a reply by the entrance of his brother, who at this instant sprang lightly into the coach. As the train started, the elder drew out a cigar-case, and very courteously begged my permission to smoke. Of course I granted it, not only because I had no right to object, but also because it was not in the least disagreeable to me.

"Give me a cigar too, Dietrich; mine are all gone," said the younger.

I opened my eyes; was that child going to smoke? The brother paid no attention to the request.

"Well, why don't you give it to me?" asked the youth.

"School-boys only smoke sub-rosa, never in public," was the dry reply.

"Why are you always so fond of teasing? Give me a cigar!" exclaimed the lad, flushing.

His brother's pleasant face was full of good-humored mischief, as he quietly put away his cigar-case and proceeded to light his cigar. The youth withdrew to the farthest corner of the coach, put up his feet across the seat, and favored us, half aloud, with a song, in which "ruby wine" was recommended as a sure preventive of death and low spirits, and drinking it extolled as life's greatest charm. I leaned back and closed my eyes. As soon as he judged from my regular breathing that I was sound asleep, he gave vent to his indignation:

"I don't know what you're thinking about. You're not my Mentor, if you *are* a few years older than I

am, and wear a uniform. You treat me like a child, and I am sixteen years old! The 'Gymnasium' is not liable to military duty, you know, and I can easily be secretary of legation before you have gained your epaulettes."

The brother laughed so gayly that I could scarcely refrain from joining in, and then said, in a low voice,—

"Be polite to ladies, if you want to be treated like a gentleman."

The little one's rage knew no bounds.

"This is unbearable!" he muttered. "I don't know what right you have to assume authority over me."

"‘Come,’ said the robber, ‘come along,
For you are weak, and I am strong!’"

quoted the elder, laughing.

"And the cigars are, alas! your own;
But, for the future, I'll travel alone,"

retorted the other, quickly, undecided whether to laugh or to be angry.

The future diplomatist now tried to gain his end by other means.

"I talked to her very politely while you were in the restaurant," he whispered to his brother. Of course he referred to me. My love of truth was so startled that, involuntarily, I opened my eyes, and the guilty one turned crimson with mortification. At that moment the train stopped; my fellow-voyagers got out, and new passengers entered.

From this time my journey was so uninteresting

that I have nothing more to tell you about it. I had just awaked from a confused dream, and was, indeed, still half asleep, when I found myself at my destination. The guard opened the door, and every one hastened to quit the car. I don't know how I ever got out; for, as I said, I was only half awake, and all the noise and crowd and bustle seemed to me like some strange vision. I heard my name pronounced by a man's voice,—an unfamiliar one,—and answered mechanically. I stumbled down the steps, and grasped my valise, plainly feeling that some one was trying to take it from my hand. Determined to defend it with my life, and convinced that I had to deal with one of the far-famed light-fingered gentry of the metropolis, I was just about to cry for help, when the same voice said, in the most respectful tones,—

“Will the Fräulein have the kindness to step into the waiting-room, and I will see to her baggage? I was sent by the Frau Präsidentin von Löben.”

Fully awake at last, I laughed, resigned my traveling-bag and umbrella, and received, instead, a card, at which I glanced with some curiosity on arriving in the waiting-room.

It was gilt-edged, and above the name was an elaborate flourish, that, at the first glance, looked almost like a crest. Beneath this was inscribed “Johann Gottlieb Ehrenreich Runnstädter, Public Waiter.” Thus I learned the high rank of my escort.

Before long, Herr Johann Gottlieb Ehrenreich appeared, announcing that the baggage was on the carriage; and I followed my elegant guide, who was

elaborately dressed in a handsome black suit, through the undulating crowd, to a droschke. It should have been a four-in-hand, to comport with the aristocratic servant. I entered the old rattle-trap, not without some uneasiness, and my companion, following me, seated himself opposite. Like all barbers, public waiters, and washerwomen, he was a great talker. Probably there is some cause for this gossipy nature in their unsettled life. From house to house, from family to family, they swarm, like bees,—though it is scarcely flower-nectar that they collect, and they certainly do not make honey out of it. Herr Runnstädter commenced by informing me that my maid—he meant my old Caroline—had desired to meet me at the depot, but that the “*Frau Präsidentin*” considered it better to send some one who would be more of a protection, and he had come, in consequence. I made a sign of assent, and he continued,—

“Had you come yesterday, however, I should not have had the honor. It was a great festival for me,—my ‘jubilee.’” I repeated the word mechanically, for I did not understand what he meant. “The five-and-twentieth anniversary of my entrance into my present calling,” he explained. “It is a long time to have been in the same business; and, as all the families I serve were satisfied with me, they expressed that satisfaction by lending their countenance to the affair.”

“Who gets up these celebrations?” I asked, in considerable surprise.

“In this case it was my colleagues,” he replied.

"Of course, we all do the same as each one's turn comes around; so we expect shortly to have several more of the same description. It is quite the fashion to celebrate these anniversaries," he explained, evidently pitying my ignorance. "Merit has nothing to do with it. The custom has become so general that no one is willing to be the exception."

Admirable! before long it will be the fashion for us old maids to celebrate our silver weddings; for if these things depend solely on "fashion," and merit has nothing to do with them, why should not silver weddings for unmarried people become "the fashion" also?

The good man seemed much inclined to enter into a long description of the feast, and even began to do so; but I was more anxious about the family than about the servants, and cut short all his attempts to return to his favorite subject. I was glad when the carriage stopped at the door of my future home. Caroline received me with as much delight as though we had been parted fourteen years instead of fourteen days, and led me up the graceful winding stairs to the upper story, while I admired the comfort and elegance of the whole establishment. Bright gas-lights illumined the staircase, and glass doors divided it from the corridors. The portion of the house retained by my hostess, and the rooms appropriated to myself, were upon the same floor. The entrance to my apartments was the farthest door on the right; one at the opposite end of the narrow corridor led to Frau von Löben's kitchen; and of the two other doors,

one was the common entrance of the family, and the other opened on the private room of the President.

As I passed the kitchen door, it was suddenly opened; a curly head appeared, and a lovely little boy ran out, exclaiming, in a clear, triumphant voice,—

“I saw her! I saw her first! I’m ahead of you all! Hurrah!”

I was on the point of capturing the little rogue and giving him a hearty kiss, when a voice, sweet and ringing, in spite of its attempted severity of tone, exclaimed,—

“For shame, Arthur! how can you be so rude?” And a pretty, fresh, young woman, appearing in the doorway, drew the child back into the room, nodding me a half-shy, blushing greeting as she did so.

Caroline was waiting impatiently to introduce me to my new apartments. A sigh of the deepest satisfaction burst from my lips as I entered, and the old woman, with tears of joy and pride, exclaimed,—

“Haven’t I done well? Doesn’t it all look nice? The Frau Präsidentin helped me, and she has such good taste! Now my greatest wish is fulfilled! You are my only mistress, and I your only servant, and we will be as happy as the day is long!”

Caroline’s face was beaming with content and pleasant anticipations, and, if I can judge so early in my sojourn, I shall have every reason to sympathize with her. I retained, as you know, the old furniture belonging to my aunt, and have, as far as possible, preserved the old arrangement, only adding neces-

sary articles, instead of exchanging it for a more modern style; so a home-feeling came over me as I looked around, and I felt that my house was my castle. Not only was I mistress, but I saw that others had taken trouble for me; both were entirely new sensations, for, as you know, my lot has, until lately, been to care and to think for others, and what little pleasure I had, was smuggled in as it were, like contraband goods, by my old Caroline. Beautiful flowers adorned my window, and Caroline's luminous countenance showed whom I had to thank for them. Pointing to a little glass dish filled with leaves and blossoms, she said, in a mysterious tone,—

“From the Frau Präsidentin.”

I bent to examine them; a rich perfume was perceptible, and on a background of green leaves was traced, in dark-blue violets, the word “Welcome!”

“How lovely!” was my first exclamation; my second, “But where do violets come from in December?”

“They are artificial,” explained Caroline, “and the perfume is eau de violette,—‘violet-water’ they call it, though it's perfectly white,—which the Frau Präsidentin poured over them.”

Disappointed, and with my enthusiasm decidedly chilled, I turned away.

“You will find plenty more artificial things here,” remarked Caroline.

Well, then, I will have to be all the more natural myself, and not let my homely common sense be deceived by the paper violets of a pretended spring.

But the comfortable song of the teakettle, which greeted me on my return from a reconnoissance of the rest of my apartments, *was* natural and home-like enough. When I was a little girl, I used to dance to its music; later in life, tea and sickness were inseparable ideas in my mind; and now, for the first time, I heard in its monotonous hum the fairy song of home-life and home-comfort. I felt unwilling to sit down all alone at my table, but Caroline persistently refused to grant my request that she would join me. I must tell you of all the housekeeping arrangements she has made for me. My tea and coffee she prepares herself. As regards my meals, she, in accordance with Frau von Löben's advice, has made an agreement with a cook formerly in princely employ, my friend Johann Ehrenreich going to his establishment at settled hours to bring them to me; so you see my housekeeping is all taken off my hands. I have nothing to do, and rejoice at the amount of time now at my disposal, when, not long ago, I could scarcely call a moment my own. How I shall work and read, and go to museums and theatres, and enjoy myself after my own fashion! Work,—but for whom? My dear Count, you must let me embroider you a rug, and you must promise to put your feet on it, for you know how much I dislike objectless working,—killing time instead of using it. I slept delightfully the night of my arrival, and much later than usual, making an excuse of my wearisome journey,—for I have no desire to attempt to redeem, among the other losses of the past, my lost sleep. How often I

have longed for it, not for myself, but for the suffering old woman to whom its kindly balm came so seldom! Will I ever forget my thoughts and feelings during those long, lonely nights? Man is a tough creature! Deeply though he be pierced by the troubles and sorrows of this world, yet he clings to life; the springs of hope and enjoyment are not easily dried up, and the darkest clouds do not long make us forget that the sky is blue after all. I have always striven to remember that. Though gray to-day, to-morrow blue! If not to-morrow, the day after; if not soon, some day. For many years I have seen the blue sky only in hope and memory; but now its vault of beauty and brightness arches at last above me. Truly I am happy; although the delusive image called youthful joy has deserted me forever, although my heart is full of sad remembrances, although I reached the age of thirty years ere I had power to say, "I will do this, and leave that undone." I am happy; but I will never attain that double happiness which, flowing from ourselves to others, comes back in a fuller, sweeter stream, that happiness which dwells in community of thought, feeling, and interest,—that I must never enjoy! Its light never shone for me, its shadows have fallen darkly upon my path. Many a time have I believed it only a dazzling dream, from which we awake in darkness and alone. Family happiness! In vain the heart, with its thousand joys and hopes and fears, strives to find in itself its all. But away with these regrets! away with the repining thought that I am like a

leaf torn from its parent tree and driven about at the pleasure of Fate's wayward breeze! To care for no one, to grieve for no one, to be accountable to no one save to the universal Father,—that is the portion of felicity appointed to us lonely ones—to us who never may taste of the bitter-sweets of family happiness. Nevertheless, each one's best dependence is in himself, and around those who stand firmest others will gather. You warned me against solitude; I am not lonely while I can fly, with my crowding thoughts, to you for sympathy, while I can make you the confidant of my inner and outer experiences; as in the home-circle we give utterance to our feelings unrestrainedly, and speak or are silent as we choose, so will I write to you. You promised to excuse the style; excuse, also, the want of logical connection. Then it will really seem as though we were again together. But you, like most wise people, are silent, and leave the talking to me.

SECOND LETTER.

THE first acquaintance was made to-day, and the first links of a chain that may bind me to my fellow-occupants—a lightly-woven, easily-broken chain—was artlessly flung around me by childish hands.

I was at the breakfast-table, when I heard gentle whispering at my door; a light knock, and then a bolder one, followed. I opened it; my curly-headed friend of last night stood before me, holding by the hand a lovely little girl, still younger than himself. The young gentleman had evidently escaped from his nurse or from his mamma in the midst of his toilet, which was by no means completed. One stocking hung down over his little morocco boot, displaying a plump leg, ornamented with every description of scratch, telling of adventurous enterprises; the other boot was only half on, and he had trodden it down at the heel; the rebellious black curls hung in disorder around the little head; and an unmistakable smear around the rosy mouth, extending over one dimpled cheek, showed that the owner had not long breakfasted. The little girl, on the contrary, was as clean as a wax doll; though I could not help noticing the torn lace that edged the unseasonable *barége* frock.

“Here we are!” said the boy,—“I and Clärchen; so good-morning.”

“Good-morning,” I repeated, taking the little fellow’s offered hand, and leading the children into the room. “And now, who are you?”

“Clärchen von Löben, four years old, No. 5 Albert Street, first floor,” said the little girl, like a parrot.

“These are our rooms, do you know?” said the boy.

“Yes, but you will let me live in them?” I asked, and received a decided nod, as a reward for my humility. “And what is your name?” I asked the boy.

“Arthur.”

“And how old are you?”

“Four—seven—five years old.”

“Five,” corrected Caroline, from my bedroom.

“And what do you want?” I continued.

“To see the strange lady,” he replied.

“To see the strange lady,” lisped the girl after him.

“Well, look at me, then.”

The two little monkeys stood before me, and the little boy opened his eyes, and the little girl her mouth, just as wide as possible. At last the former asked, “Why have you such a black dress on?”

“One of my family is dead, and so I wear mourning,” I explained.

“Is that the fashion?” asked the boy.

Heaven help us! The fashion!—already a watchword in the lips of a child five years old! Idleness and vanity raise it to its shrine; shallowness and want of judgment are its high-priests; and the multitude, falling prone, worship the golden calf. The boy seemed following his own thoughts, for suddenly he said,—

"I don't know what 'dead' means."

"Heaven be thanked!" I thought. "And may you never know, until you learn that death is but the gateway to a fairer life, and that we wear black robes not for the dead—but for ourselves."

"Ghosts are dead," whispered the little girl confidentially to me, "and they will run away with us if we are naughty; that's what Hulda always tells us when mamma isn't there."

"Who is Hulda?" I asked, quite horrified at the child's communication. She looked at me, evidently unable to comprehend why I did not know who Hulda was, while Arthur explained:

"The sewing-girl——"

"The dressmaker," corrected Clärchen.

"She gets angry when I call her 'sewing-girl:' that's why I do it," continued Arthur. "She makes mamma's and Bertha's common dresses; the tailor makes the nice ones."

"Is it true that ghosts run away with people?" asked Clärchen.

"There are no such things," I assured the timid little creature. "When Hulda tells you so, she only does it to make you good; but you ought to be good to please your papa and mamma—not from fear."

"Oh, mamma doesn't care. She scolds us sometimes, but she always gives us cakes afterwards," exclaimed Arthur, interrupting my first effort at a moral lesson. It was like a wet blanket; so I suppressed my maxims of good behavior, and, to hide my amusement, bent to kiss the lips whose practical experience

so boldly contradicted my fine theories. Those lips, as I have already said, might have been cleaner.

"But what a dirty face!" I exclaimed; and, dipping the end of a towel in water, I wiped the rosy little mouth. Then I drew up his stocking, fastened his boot, and brushed the disordered curls.

"So! now you look like a gentleman; before, I took you for a little beggar child."

He laughed. "We are very rich," he assured me.

"When mamma washes him, he cries," remarked the little girl, as I seated her before me and with a needle and thread began to repair the torn lace.

The children remained with me a long time, amusing me much by their artless prattle. Suddenly there was a violent knocking at my door, and, as Caroline opened it, a servant-woman rushed in, in the greatest excitement, and asked if I had seen anything of two children.

"The Frau Präsidentin is quite ill with fright, and so angry with her husband for not watching them better," said this person, in a rough, coarse voice; and, without a word of apology, but with numerous scolding epithets, she seized the two little culprits, dragging Clärchen (who could not get off the chair quickly enough) down by the arm.

"Who may you be?" I asked, sternly, indignant at her impudent manner.

"It is Henrietta,—our Henrietta," returned Arthur.

I told her, in a very dignified manner, not to pull the children about so roughly, and that she need not wait, as I would send them to their mother. The woman

stared at me in amazement; some impertinent rejoinder hovered on her lips, but, changing her mind, she altered it into an apology. Arthur took his little sister by the hand, and said gravely to her,—

“We won’t dare to strike this lady, will we?” whereupon the little girl looked up at me shyly and thoughtfully.

No, they will not; but how do other people’s children concern me? Thank Heaven, the responsibility of bringing them up doesn’t rest on my shoulders.

That same day I made the acquaintance of my hostess. I paid her a visit to apologize for the children’s escapade, and, moreover, to beg that I might be allowed to see as much of them as possible, not only because I felt that they would be rays of sunshine in my quiet life, but because I knew it would be a benefit to them also. They both rushed to meet me, like an old acquaintance, the moment I entered the room, and were very instrumental in removing the feeling of embarrassment natural to a first meeting; for as soon as the mother saw the intimate footing I was on with her children, she naturally felt more at her ease with me, and, besides, it gave us something to talk about. I will here give you a sketch of the family and their surroundings, or rather will tell you what little I have learned of them in my short acquaintance. Frau von Löben is young, very pretty, and charming in manner. My cool reserve thawed entirely before the urgent, almost affectionate, way in which she begged that I would be sociable. She impressed me with the idea that she had fallen

in love with me at first sight; but I do not place much confidence in these speedy conquests. She has several children,—three of her own, and four stepchildren, the offspring of the President's former marriage. On my first visit to her, I met, besides my two little friends, another daughter, Gertrude, a child about eleven years old, not pretty, but with such a quiet, gentle expression that she made on me a much pleasanter impression than did Bertha, Frau von Löben's stepdaughter,—“our beauty,” as she calls her. “Our beauty” appeared to me a rather conceited and somewhat *blasée* young lady, with very little in her pretty head except dress and pleasure. Besides these there are three stepsons, the eldest an officer in the “Guards,” the second still at school, and the third a cadet at some preparatory establishment. The latter is at home now, on leave, and in his honor a juvenile ball is to be given, to which his stepmother has invited me. The two elder boys, now off on a holiday, are also expected to return in time for the grand occasion. Apparently the Löbens are well off. It is true that, with all the elegance of their dress and establishment, it seems a little strange that they should keep none but female servants, and should only have a man (the one who met me at the cars) engaged for a certain number of hours each day. However, Frau von Löben assures me that, with few exceptions, such is the general custom here. Everything can easily be had outside the house, and for any unexpected emergency extra labor is always readily to be secured. I merely repeat what she told

me. According to my ideas, the home is in itself a little world, whether it be large or small, containing the highest type of earthly happiness. Everything in it should work in perfect accord,—family and servants, rules and habits. That is what distinguishes it from a mere hotel, where everything can be had, it is true, but which is not home. Each hand should have its appointed portion, and that portion should be measured by the strength and the number of hands. Then this “outside labor” would not be necessary, or, if at all, only for sudden and unanticipated emergencies. Of course there are different grades of homes,—the palace of the rich, where each branch of work has its appointed servant; the home of the middle class, where wife, daughter, and servant evenly divide the labor; and the hut of the poor, where there are none but laboring hands; but such housekeeping as this, where servants are procured for the need of the moment, seems to me to lack solid foundation. Where there are so many children there must be much work. Frau von Löben showed me hers,—her flower-stand and ivy-frame, the former full of lovely plants, the latter in perfect order, and growing beautifully,—charming and poetical occupations, which forced me to conclude that her more homely duties were either very admirably or very carelessly performed. She herself says that her mornings run away almost without her being conscious of it, and she has to hurry so as to be dressed in time to receive visitors. While the mother tends flowers and receives company, what do the children do? I cannot tell, yet. I did not

see anywhere in the sitting-room either a sewing-table or a work-basket; but little Gertrude, who moved a stool close beside my chair, was busily occupied in making a doll's dress.

"She is an industrious child,—the best of them all," whispered the mother, seeing that I observed the little girl.

Bertha pouted, and in the conversation which ensued, on the bringing up of children, made some very silly and dogmatically-spoken remarks. She declared she hated the very words; that young people should bring themselves up, as they certainly knew their own disposition better than any one else did.

"But suppose that disposition should be a bad one?" said I.

"There may be different opinions on that subject," she replied; "and, of course, one places most confidence in one's own judgment."

I looked at the girl in amazement.

"Children and fools speak the truth," it is said.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Fifteen," she replied.

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, involuntarily.

She blushed to her very temples; and Frau von Löben said, in a tone that merely recognized the fact, and did not disapprove of it,—

"Yes, our young people are very wise; it is of no use to argue with them. The old-fashioned ideas and rules are totally disregarded. Formerly, respect was always exacted from the younger to the elder. That is no longer the fashion."

"I always thought that fashion was a word applying merely to outward things," I said. "It is true that these stand in close connection with our inner life, with our moral and æsthetic sentiments; but that they should rule and regulate them, or that obligations should be changed or thrown aside at the whim of fashion, like worn-out dresses and bonnets, I will never acknowledge; or, if such really be the case, it must be a most evil state of affairs."

"We live in evil times," said Frau von Löben, "and must adapt ourselves to them. In Rome we must do like the Romans."

"No," I replied, "I think we should struggle against these influences, and use all our power to discountenance them."

Bertha laughed, with a supercilious air which gave a most unpleasant expression to her pretty features. "That is the way people always talk," she said, "when they first come from the country; but it isn't long before they fall in with the general customs and follow the universal fashions. I have already seen plenty of skirts that barely touched the floor"—she glanced at mine as she spoke, and at the long pelerine I usually wear—"grow into sweeping trains, and plenty of old-fashioned dresses altered to suit the prevailing style. Fashion is, and always will be, a mighty power."

"A power just so far as you acknowledge her as such, and consent to bow to her sway," I replied. "But what is to be the limit of her authority? Some leading modiste may become insane, and fashion

decree that we must all have our heads shaved, as hers was when she was taken to the asylum. Man is an imitative being, you know; and whither one sheep leads, others are sure to follow."

"But surely we never would imitate an insane modiste," said Bertha.

"I beg your pardon," I answered. "What should distinguish our dress? Undoubtedly, beauty and convenience. Then you surely will acknowledge that those who instituted the present style cannot have been possessed of either sense or judgment. Do you think it very convenient to have people continually walking over your dress, or to be continually walking over theirs? or is it pleasant to have one's feet enveloped in it, as in a bundle? And as for beauty, ask any painter if it be possible to discover in a modern costume a trace of artistic grace. I insist that whoever invented the present fashion is well worthy of a cell in an institution for the insane."

"I think that many agree with you," said Frau von Löben; "but what does it avail? The few cannot reform the many."

"The mass consists of separate individuals, and would need no reformer if each of those individuals would reform himself or herself."

Bertha asked me, rather impertinently, how long I had been in the capital, or if I had made all these remarkable discoveries elsewhere.

"In the capital only a few days," I replied, in the most amiable manner, "but in the world for thirty years; and although formerly children did not know

so much as they do now, yet I have had time and opportunities enough to be able to measure my opinions with those of the wisest children."

The entrance of her father cut short Bertha's reply, and a look of decided indignation and dislike was all she could bestow upon me. I ignored it in the calmest manner, and rose to greet the master of the house.

"How ill the man looks!" was my first thought. Whether it be age, care, or bad health—or all three—which has so bowed him, I cannot tell. He is a tall, slender man, and were he stouter would be a very handsome one. His clothes hang in folds around him; his hair is mixed with gray; his complexion is of a sickly sallow hue, with a hectic color on the cheeks; his eyes have a strange brightness about them, but, in spite of their look of ill health, express unmistakable kindness of heart. There was such geniality, such unaffected warmth, in his simple greeting that, although I ascribed them not to anything in myself, but rather to his own gentle, pleasant disposition, it made far more impression upon me than the gushing reception given me by his wife. With him, as it were, the foundation is prepared on which to build a firm and solid friendship; with her the building seems all ready for its occupant, but the whole fabric is so fragile that I cannot but doubt its power to resist the first storm that comes to prove it. It is much safer to build up a friendship gradually; a quickly-formed one is little to be depended upon. Everything in this world must be struggled for.

What comes to us without effort usually departs as easily.

I now took my leave, as I judged from the return of the President, as well as from the movements of the waiter in the neighboring apartment, that the dinner-hour must be approaching. Frau von Löben insisted on accompanying me as far as my room, taking occasion to tell me how kind her husband was, and how happy she herself was,—how the President's appearance of ill health often troubled her and gave her great anxiety, but that he was perfectly well, and was only somewhat overburdened with work. Did I think he looked badly? All this she said standing at my room-door. I asked her three times to come in; three times she refused, with the remark that it was the dinner-hour, and that her husband did not like to wait. My dear Count, if first the man-servant, then the maid, and then Bertha, had not come to call her, and had not I, finally, with playful violence compelled her to go, we would have been standing there and talking yet. It made me think of my visits to you. I felt precisely as though I were with you once more, and unable to make up my mind to leave, although the horses were stamping impatiently outside the door, and Johann had already three times announced, "The carriage is waiting." Good-by, then,—one more grasp of the hand. The wings of my fancy sink wearily down, and I feel that I am far from you. All is still,—only from time to time the merry sound of childish voices comes to my listening ear.

THIRD LETTER.

I HAVE a perfect recollection of a masked ball of my childhood, and even now I look back upon it as on some lovely fairy-tale, although the cruel sport my aunt made of me gave me for a few moments the bitterest heartache I ever had in my life. She had made me put on my costume reversed, and my face was turned to the wall, whilst an absurd mask grinned mockingly from the back of my head. Perhaps it was symbolic. To the joys of this life my back has always been turned, and sometimes I can hardly resist the feeling of mocking scorn that comes over me as I contemplate the trivial pleasures of the fashionable world. But that evening I was eagerly awaiting the moment to turn around and join in the merriment I heard but could not see. That came in an unexpected manner. One of the boys struck me, laughingly, on the shoulder, and exclaimed, "Why, Hildegard has her hump in front to-night!"

I turned passionately around, struck the nearest person to me (an innocent looker-on), and burst into a flood of tears. My aunt shook me roughly by the arm: "Look whom you are striking, will you? What cause have you to be angry if one person remarks what every one sees? Whether hump-backed or not, go enjoy yourself!"

Those words I never forgot. I never strike blindly, never strike revengefully, and even her last piece of advice I have striven all my life long to follow, as I strove to follow it then. It was the gayest evening of my life. And in what did its gayety consist? Tinsel and bright ribbons, a few more lights than usual, home-made cake and raspberry wine, and at about nine o'clock a simple supper, the crowning point of which was a farina pudding. Such were the splendors which rendered that evening a never-to-be-forgotten one. They would be scorned by children nowadays. We have advanced since then. As each new fashion comes in, it displaces the last one. From simplicity to comfort, from comfort to luxury, thence to extravagance; so the ladder mounts upward, step by step,—but whither? I fear the ambitious climbers will ere long totter on their dizzy height and be plunged into a bitter depth of misery before they succeed in regaining their once-contemned lost Paradise of happy simplicity.

But I must tell you about last night. At first I thought I certainly was in fairy-land. It really looked like it. The gloomy, rather disorderly nursery had been transformed into a fresh, green wood, where fairy forms disported gayly. Fir branches covered the walls, and among the dark-green twigs were brackets on which stood blooming plants. A handsome chandelier shed a light as bright as day upon happy childish eyes, which reflected it even more brightly. When I entered the room, the company was already pretty well assembled,—not only

the children, but the mothers and sisters who had been invited to share in the pleasure of the little ones. I soon made a large number of new acquaintances, and felt precisely as though I were a piece of cake being passed around,—everybody says “thanks” in the most courteous manner, but nobody takes it. When the introductions were over, I really had done nothing more than look at the people who had been presented, and my memory retained little of their names, save confused ideas of the feminine form of every possible variety of title. I determined not to trouble my mind much about it, but if “Frau,” or “Frau von,” wouldn’t do, to call all the wives of the civil officers “Geheimeräthin,” and those of the military, “Excellenz,”—and if that wasn’t right, why, I couldn’t help it.

When I had taken my place in the circle of ladies, Frau von Löben introduced to me her three stepsons. Fancy my surprise when my two traveling-companions stood before me! I forgot the poor little cadet entirely, so amused was I at this meeting with my two acquaintances, and at the convicted aspect of the elegantly-dressed young Joachim.

“It is always pleasant to meet old friends,” I said, mischievously, and, turning to him, remarked, “Have you succeeded in obtaining those cigars yet, Herr von Löben? I mean the ones you thought you deserved to have for your politeness to me while your brother was in the restaurant.”

“Thunder! Then you weren’t asleep, and heard us quarreling?” he exclaimed, in decided consternation;

and then added, quite repentantly, "I beg your pardon, most sincerely."

"For the 'thunder,' or for the politeness, or for your recommendation of the ladies' car, or for the quarrel?" I asked, laughing.

"Not for the quarrel, for you were asleep, you know; but for the 'thunder,' which is not *comme-il-faut* in my mother's parlor," replied the impudent young fellow, making me a profound bow.

"I am glad to see that you respect your mother's parlor, and to find that there is a place where it will not be necessary to keep out of your way, as it generally is with boys of your age, unless one wishes to assume the office of their absent tutor."

I had spoken in a very low tone; no one could possibly have heard what I said; but a fat, little, old lady, whose name I had forgotten, nodded to me as I spoke, and then, rising, drew near to listen to our conversation. The reproof was sharp, and its effect surprised me. The youth's eyes met mine in a full, bold glance. There was no trace of embarrassment in it; for what can embarrass an unabashed boy of his age? But there *was* confidence in me,—decided confidence. Then he answered, with that comical mixture of affectation and childishness which often ends in complete foppery and silliness, but which is in itself only a sort of transition state,—

"I beg your pardon; but it is my maxim to see as much as possible of human nature. I set boldly about it; but, to tell you the truth, I like best of all those who are least tolerant towards me."

"Very flattering, my young sir," I said, making him a low courtesy. "I shall try to deserve your good opinion."

"Oh, you should not scorn a school-boy's good opinion," he said, drawing himself up. "The school-boy becomes a man, and the good opinion may become true friendship."

"Why not?" I said to myself, and looked at my future friend. "The boy is a coxcomb, but I like him for all." I held out my hand.

"We will shake hands on it," I said.

He pressed it heartily, shook his bright curls, and hurried away. His mother looked at me inquiringly. I told her of the circumstance, treating her son's rudeness as a jest. But I might have painted it in the blackest colors, and she would have been none the less delighted.

"That is just like him!" she said. "The naughty boy! But he is as bright and as amiable as he can be; he is the best of them all."

I exchanged a few words, also, with Dietrich, but Bertha interrupted us. The young girl looked perfectly lovely, and was completely in her element. She entreated her brother to come and dance with a lady who had no partner. He refused, at first, decidedly, but at last allowed himself to be flattered and coaxed into consenting. A hearty embrace was his reward.

"Now, I have to open the ball with the ugliest girl in the room," he said, "just because she is Bertha's friend and has no partner."

"That is very thoughtful of Bertha," said I.

"Oh, yes, she *is* very kind,—much more so than she appears to strangers. There is something about the girl—I call it '*mum*.'"

"What do you mean?" I asked, laughing.

"Ah, if you can't imagine it, I don't know how to tell you," he replied, laughing also. "Mum is mum; you can call it '*murr*,' if you choose. It means the same."

This explanation did not help me much; but, though I never had any talent for languages, this sort of "thieves' Latin" of young people has a sort of attraction for me; so I displayed my comprehension of the new word by saying that his brother Joachim had plenty of it.

"Yes, indeed," answered Dietrich; "but he needs putting down."

"And *that* you attend to?"

"Yes; and he revenges himself on the cadet."

"Who, in his turn, revenges himself on the little ones?"

"Oh, no; he is too young yet."

"But who puts you down?—as putting down seems necessary to the possessor of this singular something, of which you doubtless have your share."

"Oh, Fate does it for me, or rather tries to; however, '*Merry live and happy die!*'"

The music here interrupted him. The couples formed; old and young, all took part. I looked on, and the fat old lady, already mentioned, said,—

"You do not dance, either; I am so glad! I was

afraid I would be left by myself. Come over here and sit by me, and we will watch them and have a nice talk all to ourselves."

Frau von Löben overheard her words, and turned to me.

"Be careful!" she said, raising her finger, warningly; "a two-edged sword is blunt, compared to that tongue."

The old lady only laughed.

"Are you afraid?" she asked, in a good-humored but somewhat brusque tone.

"I don't know yet," I replied.

"Well, I will tell you," she continued. "People can't bear the truth unless it is sugar-coated; and then they swallow the sweet part and throw the rest away as indigestible. The arrows of folly and malice are sharper and more poisoned, but they often shoot past the mark, and are not felt like the shafts of truth, which fly straight home. Don't you think so?"

I could not but acknowledge the truth of the observation.

"Nothing provokes me more," she continued, "than people who pretend to excuse everything, and parade their compassion until they make the judge a criminal."

The original remarks of my new acquaintance amused me. They were very different from the ordinary cut-and-dried phrases of a first meeting. Suddenly she turned again towards me. "I heard your conversation with that boy," she said. "You, too,

can shoot straight to the mark. Before long they will call *you* sharp, also."

"Better that than dull," I replied.

She nodded. "I think we will suit each other," she said. "I am too straightforward in speaking my mind. I tread with my whole weight; none but old people should do that; the younger ones must step more lightly. So I will serve as a horrible warning to you."

She looked at me keenly, as if to judge whether I understood her words and what I thought of them. I suppose she was surprised to see from my expression that I did not take her warning amiss, and thought she would try me still further:—

"You told Joachim the truth boldly. I like that. But can you bear to *hear* it? Shall I try? I shall not spare you."

"You have my full permission," I said, laughingly.

"We will see. You are, I believe, deformed?"

"I am perfectly aware of that fact, my dear Frau Geheimeräthin," I replied, quickly, much amused.

"Positively, you did not even turn red. I see you are not sensitive to your bodily infirmity; so you must have a sound mind. Let us be good friends. By the way," she continued, "why did you call me Frau Geheimeräthin?"

"Aren't you that? Then, shall I call you 'Excellenz'?"

"I suppose you think I am fat and old enough to be one," she replied. "You have given me my right name; but, if you thought to retort upon me, you

were mistaken. I scorn most heartily that title-worship which is a distinguishing characteristic of our modern society. My husband's title is as little a weak point with me as your deformity seems to be with you. He *was* once 'Geheimerath,' but I, his widow, claim no title save 'Frau von Schönau;' call me by that name."

I felt sure that we should be good friends, and that I would find much that was charming in the old lady, in spite of her furrowed face and her disproportionately broad figure. During this little conversation, the couples "chassez-ed" by us, led, to my surprise, by the President and little Clärchen. She scarcely reached to his knee, and in her white dress with its rose-colored sash, just the shade of her round dimpled cheeks, looked, in contrast with the tall, sallow man, like a little spring flower at the foot of a leafless tree,—she opening her tender calyx to the morning sun,—at his root, the fatal axe. I had to turn away, it was so sad a sight to see the train of merry children thus led, as it were, by Life and Death. Life and Death! not opponents,—mighty allies are they; coequal rulers of this world of ours. Who can oppose their resistless power? The poorest traveler cannot find rest whilst the one holds him in its fetters. Youth, love, beauty, riches, happiness,—nothing can save the victim of the other, or ward off his unerring blows. Terrible indeed is it to contemplate one's utter powerlessness in the presence of Life and Death. Strange thoughts at a child's ball! They passed away with the last notes of the polonaise,

at the termination of which the President resigned his little partner to his youngest son. What a funny little couple they were,—Arthur and Clärchen! Regardless of time or step, they rushed blindly into the thickest of the crowd, and, tumbling down, quietly sat, without losing their hold of each other, till they found opportunity to rise, when, clambering to their feet, they recommenced. Knocked against, trodden down, twisted around, they danced on without pause, save these involuntary ones, with happy faces, and most admirable perseverance, striving to make headway against opposing fortune; and it was singular that the little ones did not seem to be wearied by their violent exercise, whilst I was almost breathless with laughing and merely watching them. I needed a hundred eyes fully to take in the varying images around me, for two were comparatively useless. Children and elegantly-dressed ladies, affectation and the purest simplicity, pretentiousness and modesty, here the first dawn of maidenly reserve, there childhood's unrestrained abandonment of itself to pleasure; and yet all these contradictions were lost sight of in the universal good humor and enjoyment.

“No, I won't dance with you,” said the cadet to a little girl, who, with juvenile disregard of “the proprieties,” had offered herself as his partner. “You have no gloves on, and you'll make mine dirty.”

“But my gloves are torn,” said the child, piteously.

“Are those a soldier's manners?” said Dietrich to his brother, sternly, holding out his hand to the disappointed little girl. “Come, Helene, I will dance

with you! Only wait till you are an officer; then you will be taught a lesson," he added, to the boy, as he whirled past with his little partner. Dietrich seems to consider this sort of "putting down" the first principle of all education. Perhaps he is right. Some natures, doubtless, absolutely require it; but it would be the wisest course to do it for ourselves. Helene, however, did not profit by experience, for, after her dance with Dietrich, she actually repeated her request to the little cadet,—a touching example of womanly trust and forgiveness. These were, as usual, unappreciated, for the boy whispered, in reply, "You are perfectly shameless;" but, fearing another reproof from Dietrich, who stood close by, was compelled to grant her request. It was my greatest source of amusement to watch the cadet dance; he was such an admirable caricature of his eldest brother. What was grace with the elder became, with the younger, affectation, and elegance an absurd consciousness. At every step he seemed to be saying, "Only look at me." I did him that favor, and he evidently noticed it, taking it, of course, as a sign of admiration, for he managed constantly to dance in my immediate vicinity, and at last, when I had just finished a piece of cake, and was holding the empty plate, he rushed up with the most officious politeness to relieve me of it. I had not yet spoken to him, so availed myself of this opportunity. He answered like a person of double his years, but seemed precocious rather than really sensible.

"What was the name of the little girl with whom

you refused to dance because she had no gloves?" I asked, at last.

He blushed. "That was not the only reason," answered he. "I am not rude to ladies; but those who force themselves on one in such a manner do not deserve that title."

The boy was right. The young Löbens seem very singular to me; but perhaps all children are alike, and it may be I notice their peculiarities especially because I have been so little thrown with young people. These children's minds appear to me like a disorderly drawer, containing every description of motley object, part out of place, part only fit to be thrown away; but we find, on examination, among the mental chaos some scraps of sound sense, some fragments of good feeling.

"But you danced with her at last," I said.

He pointed to Dietrich. "We must bow to tyranny," he said, "until we have power to crush it."

"And what is the tyranny here?" I asked, half amused, and half ashamed of my sympathy with the little upstart.

"A sound boxing," he answered, with a sudden relapse into boyishness that quite won my heart. "They both tyrannize over me because they are stronger than I am; but they won't be so long. Look, am I not large for my age? Did you ever see a more muscular arm, or a broader chest?"

He straightened himself up, and stretched out his right arm to show me the swelling muscles. I was much entertained at this unexpected study of anat-

omy, but was about to express my admiration, when Frau von Löben hastened towards us.

"The boy is crazy!" she exclaimed. "Whenever I see him strike that attitude, I come at once to look after him. He is as proud of his thews and sinews as if we were still in the Middle Ages, or as if trials of strength and dragons and giants were every-day matters."

"Mother," he exclaimed, "I don't know a boy of my age as large and as strong as I am!"

"Is that any merit of yours?" she said, reproachfully. "If it were not unmotherly and unchristian, I would wish that we might have a war as soon as he gets his commission, so as to work off some of his superfluous vigor. But he's a good boy," she continued, patting his cheek,—*"the best of them all."*

"The best of them all" number three! Happy mother, who thinks each of her children *"the best of them all;"* but I am by no means sure that this open praise is very good for the children.

I have not yet spoken of Gertrude. She did not look very presentable, and her costume gave me the impression that her mother had not thought it worthwhile to make much effort to beautify her. The white frock was of a bad color, and the little short-waisted figure looked very much as though dressed in a sack drawn in at the waist. She is not destined to make much sensation in the *"gay world."* Would that she were educated for home instead of for society! I made use of one of the pauses in the dancing to question Frau von Löben about my original friend, Frau von

Schönau. Before she could reply, the lady herself rose from her seat, put her arm in mine, and drew me away.

"Ask no questions about me, save of myself," she said. "Most people have no judgment; indeed, they hardly know themselves,—what can they know of others? Now, tell me what you want to hear about me."

I was somewhat embarrassed by this unusual proceeding.

"I don't know, exactly," I replied, half provoked. "It is natural, when people seem worth taking an interest in, to strive to learn something of them."

"Search the matter for yourself, then," she said. "You have plenty of good sense; and, if it serves you in one case, it surely can in others. It is more just, more interesting, and more satisfactory to see with one's own eyes than with those of others. What people say of me is utter nonsense,—I know it all by heart. Don't ask anybody else about me."

She spoke half laughingly, half warningly, and I yielded. The ball went on; the hours fled; no one seemed at all weary. It was all very different from the simple and unpretending ball of my childhood. No home-made cake and raspberry wine,—no, indeed! Ice-creams of various kinds, fancy cakes, and a bowl of punch. Just when I supposed the ball over, and was thinking, in surprise, of the late hour to which it had been prolonged, supper was announced. You should have seen the young gentlemen, from five to thirteen years old (Joachim and Dietrich I except, of course), rushing in search of their favorite fair ones; how here,

as in older companies, little intrigues and plots were resorted to to gain this or that cavalier; how some modestly hung back, and some pushed themselves forward. Little coteries were formed; one especial group of the *élite* separated entirely from the mass of the company; the arrogant were supported, the diffident thrust aside, and honest admiration changed into politic homage. Were these really children, assembled for harmless amusement, or were they little men and women, and ten years older than their apparent age? Well schooled, indeed, will these girls be when they enter society! Accustomed to ball-room tricks from their earliest childhood, thoroughly familiar with vanity and coquetry, what wonders of fashionable art will they present! So much complaint is made of the *blasé* characters of our young people—does not the cause lie in this early dissipation? You know, my dear Count, how apt I am plainly to speak my thoughts. I had been handed to a place next to the master of the house, and could not help expressing some of my reflections.

“I thought you seemed perfectly carried away by the universal enjoyment,” he said, with some surprise. I acknowledged that I had been so at first, but could not help losing sight of the fairy-like beauty of the scene, as I thought of the pernicious consequences that would surely result from it.

“You and my wife differ, then,” he said. “She looks on the poetic side of life, and regards pleasure as the brightest star that illumines our earthly pilgrimage.”

"I do not think that pleasure should be made the ruling idea of life," I said.

"It is so already," said the President. "Money and pleasure are the ruling divinities of the whole world, and, unfortunately, are usually closely connected. At any rate, it is difficult to have pleasure without money, though we certainly can have money without pleasure. We see no more fresh, bright, unaffected happiness, overflowing in merriment and frolic. No, there is a sort of pretentiousness about it all; and on this rock is wrecked all self-forgetfulness,—one of the truest sources of a cheerful, happy nature! How we frolicked when we were children! But now no one blows soap-bubbles, even,—except gilded ones!"

He spoke these sad truths in the most unconcerned manner,—as though they were not of the slightest consequence. I looked at the man in surprise. No trace of frivolity lay on the grave, melancholy features, only a sort of resignation and a look of deep weariness.

"I was brought up very differently," he continued, "but my children belong to the present generation, and must fight their own way. It will not be an easy task for them; these are evil times. Everywhere the waves are swelling above the old tide-marks. Perhaps they may, if they ever ebb, leave fertile land behind them,—but that will not be in our day,—and how many of our darlings may perish in the overflow!"

"They should be strengthened for the struggle," I said.

"And how?"

"By careful training. Why cast aside excellent customs because they belong to the past?"

"It is hard to battle against new ways and ideas. Which should be the first one attacked?"

"Useless extravagance!" interrupted Frau von Schönau. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you think," he said, turning to me, "that a mother's tender heart can consent to see her little ones worse dressed than their childish companions, or to deny them pleasures that all other children have? Can a housekeeper's pride bear to entertain her guests less handsomely than she herself is entertained? It requires true strength of character to be above these trivialities; a most desirable quality, but one now rarely found. Only try such reforms; at once the cry arises, 'But that is the fashion,—that *must* be done!'—Fashion is a heavier chain than that which fetters the galley-slave; and there you have the third grand watchword of the day,—fashion, money, and pleasure."

"I thought freedom was another?" I said.

"It is shouted the loudest of all," he said; "but, unhappily, tyranny is looked for where it does not exist, instead of in its real strongholds, and so true freedom is rarely gained. To seek is the lot of every one, but I have never met a man who had found the object of his search and was contented with it."

He had made a sad impression upon me, as I said; but rather because I thought him in ill health, and from the contrast to his blooming little partner in the

dance, than from any suspicion, which now entered my mind for the first time, that a melancholy, world-weary spirit dwelt in the frail tenement. I expressed something of the sort, of course putting it in such a form as to give no offense.

"The child begged, her mamma seconded the petition, and it is very hard for me to refuse. Indeed, I think that is my greatest failing."

I thought so myself, and afterwards found in this failing a key to many things that would otherwise have surprised me, including the splendid supper; for no amount of wealth could justify or excuse its injudiciousness. Champagne being the fashionable drink, it was there in profusion; and I could not but wonder at the skill with which Joachim opened one bottle after another.

"Don't let them have too much," said the President, across the table, to his wife.

"Oh, no; Dietrich will see to that," she answered, reassuringly, rising as she spoke, to see that the children all had a full supply. She came over to us presently in great enthusiasm. "How well you look!" she said to her husband. "But you ought to go among the children more. You cannot imagine how amusing it is to listen to their conversation; they talk precisely like grown people."

Grown people already! never to be children! and, yet, "of such is the kingdom of heaven," I thought to myself.

"What do you think George said to me?" she continued. "I asked why he took little Lieschen Metz-

ner in to supper,—she is such an ugly little thing,—and he answered, ‘I had to, mamma; you know she has money!’”

Frau von Schönau expressed her opinion that a good flogging would prove a potent charm to exorcise the demon of gold-worship. The President, laughing, agreed with her. Frau von Löben cried, in horror, “What are you thinking of? A flogging! to a royal cadet! What would become of his sense of honor and his self-respect?”

“Royal cadet!” replied the old lady; “royal little fool. The flogging wouldn’t hurt his sense of honor, I can answer for it.”

Frau von Löben shrugged her shoulders, and returned to the subject of the little heiress.

“She will not want for offers when she grows up, though she *is* ugly. Money and beauty rarely go together. Well, the kind Father, who placed her in the world, will not forget her!”

How much the “kind Father” is required to do! I should reverence him none the less sincerely did He omit to perform one-half of what is expected of Him. How much, unspeakably much, more does He do than we deserve!

When supper was over, the music recommenced.

“I am going!” said Frau von Schönau. “It is twelve o’clock, and the children are actually going to begin dancing again. Did you ever hear of such madness?”

I shook my head.

“You are prudent,” she said; “but it is of no avail;

your face betrays that you are of my opinion. You wear a long pelerine to conceal a physical defect; but truth needs no concealment,—she is fairest unveiled.”

Again the keen gray eyes rested piercingly on me, as if once more to see whether the supposed wound she probed so mercilessly were really as little sensitive as it appeared. I held out my hand.

“Do feel my pulse,” I said, “and see that it beats none the quicker, and convince yourself once for all that I am neither hurt nor angry; then we need not always be talking of my deformity. I love and prize truth, and never knowingly sin against her; but, if I understood you rightly, you, yourself, said that a light garment took away nothing from her beauty, and secured her more followers than if she appeared——”

“In classic nakedness,” she interrupted. “That may be so; but under the veil of refinement many a lie passes for truth, and, indeed, the days we live in seem to me but one great lie. But you are much younger than I am, so you have more need to be polite. I cannot wait any longer to see this thirst for pleasure rubbing the soft down from the cheek of the young fruit. So, good-night! I hope we shall see each other often.”

She left without pausing to take leave of any one. Strange woman! I should like to know her better. Behind all her brusquerie there is a keen intellect and a good heart. I turned my attention once again to the company. They were still gayly dancing, without a sign of weariness, and unmindful of the obstacles laid in their way by Arthur and Clärchen,

who were again displaying their wonderful talent for tumbling down.

"The 'German' now!" said Dietrich, placing his partner, a little girl five years old, on a chair, and proceeding to draw down her pantalets, which had mounted up over the little bare knees. In this dance the largest girls were given as partners to the smallest boys, and *vice versa*. Arthur and Clärchen formed the sole exception. Dietrich led, but was considerably embarrassed by his tiny partner, upon whom he was compelled to mount guard, as the moment he left her side she toddled across the room to her mother, and shyly hid her face in her lap. At last I came to his aid, much to his relief. It really gave me pleasure to watch him, for I could not but admire the young man's natural and childlike manner. But this sitting in rows and dancing in regular succession did not seem to please the children. Dietrich had much trouble to preserve order. Everywhere deserters slipped from the ranks; so, seeing his authority menaced, he made a most masterly retreat.

"Stand up, all of you!" he cried, stepping into the middle of the room. "I shall not tell you what you are to dance till I have counted three, and then——"

The children sprang to their feet, their faces bright with expectation.

"Stand perfectly still," cried Dietrich once more. "One, two, three!" With the last word he shook a gigantic horn of bonbons, which Joachim handed to him, over the heads of the children. In an instant the floor seemed transformed into a bed of bright

flowers, from which proceeded cries of delight and shouts of laughter. Even the mothers yielded to the general excitement, and, as eagerly as the children, fell upon the sweet booty,—though not for themselves.

The feast ended, at least, in true childish fashion. Yes, my dear friend, if pleasure were the great object of life it would be well to seek it eagerly; but moderation! moderation in all things. We are running with seven-league boots into extravagance and emptiness of all sorts, and moderation seems forgotten. But I see the smile upon your face, which has so often warned me that before condemning others we should look upon ourselves with a keen, searching gaze. I understand the hint, and end at the same time my reflections and my letter.

FOURTH LETTER.

WHAT strange things our hopes and wishes are! How fair seems the goal at which we are aiming! Only when we are close beside it do we see the shadow,—the shadow that seems inseparable from our earthly existence. And even if the shadow be not heavy, there is not that golden light which from a distance seemed to play around the object of our desires. My dear Count, there falls a dark shadow over my longed-for independence. I have to take my meals alone! And I don't know anything more difficult to do alone, except to quarrel. It is one of the hardest things in the world! Nothing tastes as it should; I swallow everything so hot that it burns my mouth, and am done in two minutes; and those two minutes seem spent on a desert island. Caroline could help me; but she obstinately refuses. I begged her, almost on my knees, to keep me company; but she will not. She says it "isn't proper."

"Caroline," I answered, "we are both human beings; we both have mouths; you eat with a knife and fork, not with your fingers; we often talk together, why should we not eat together? Do you think there will be separate heavens arranged for us?"

"I don't know about that," she replied; "but here our stations are different."

"But that is merely a conventionality; I am willing to dispense with it."

"If I were a lady, I would sit down willingly with you; but, as I am not, I can't. Nothing is right that does not become one's station."

There is no use in arguing with Caroline; her sound logic is always too much for me.

"That is just how it is here in the city," she continued. "Everything is so for show, that nothing seems what it really is." I looked up, in expectancy, for her gossip talk amuses me. "The servants act as though they were ladies and gentlemen; and as for the ladies and gentlemen themselves—! Would you believe that the Frau Präsidentin's cook will not go across the street until she has spent an hour in dressing herself? She fixes her hair in two puffs,—one is not enough,—and puts on a huge hoop petticoat; the little one she wears in the kitchen, which is always knocking things over, won't do for the street, she says. If I was her mistress, I would not let her wear one, either in the street or in the kitchen. Laziness and labor, each has its own livery, and whoever adopts the livery of laziness will soon be in its service; and nobody can live either by playing lady or by being one."

"Caroline, you are too severe; you talk as though to be a mistress was to be lazy."

"Well, it isn't much better," she answered, "the little bit they do. Giving orders and seeing after things is easier than working, I'm sure. But where the mistress is bad, the servants are sure to be so

too. It is half the time the mistress's fault when the servants are worthless."

"Well, what can we do?" I asked.

"How do I know? I'm not a mistress; if I was I could tell you," was the dry reply. "But I'll tell you one thing,—my servants should do what I wanted, or I'd know the reason why."

"But, Caroline," I argued, "you judge entirely by the servants here in this house."

"I see plenty besides them," she answered; "they all dress up like rich people. Servants are the finest-dressed people in town. On Sundays you see silk bonnets all trimmed up with flowers on girls that are in the kitchen all the week, and often their whole month's wages is on their backs. Women who stand six days at the wash-tub sail along on Sundays in silk and satin,—they all want to look like ladies,—and the ladies wear military jackets, so as to have something different. If the masters and mistresses would only all agree," continued Caroline, "to hire no servant who wears a hoop-skirt, or ribbons in her hair, or flowers on her bonnet, there would be an end of all this nonsense; but they themselves often eat cake when they cannot afford to pay for bread."

When I went to pay Frau von Löben a visit this afternoon (I go quite often now, and feel sincere and increasing interest in the family), I found her in the kitchen, in conversation with a lady whose back was turned towards me. I was about to withdraw. "Stop a moment," said Frau von Löben; "I will have finished in one instant." The lady turned around; to

quote Caroline, it was a face which left the kitchen only on Sundays. Above it rose a mighty structure of ribbons and flowers. I supposed that Frau von Löben had had some disagreement with her servant, and that the latter had "given her notice," and afterwards found that I was right. A most extraordinary difference it was, too. The woman had been very impertinent to Frau von Löben, and the latter had called her "a fool." The offended servant replied that she was *no* fool,—that she was betrothed, and could be married any day she chose. Frau von Löben declared that it was perfectly possible to be a fool and yet to be engaged. The woman denied this well-known fact, and neither would give up her opinion. Finally the master was called, who declared Henrietta to be "not only a fool, but a great fool;" and the end of the business was that the girl, insulted in her dignity both as woman and as *fiancée*, had announced her intention of leaving at once. I must acknowledge that when Joachim told me this story, which he did in the drollest way imaginable, I laughed most heartily, although I could not but be surprised at a lady's having descended either to a dispute with her servant or to the use of the terms employed by Frau von Löben.

This is by no means the only scene of the sort that has taken place between the Präsidentin and her servants. Her quick temper, want of self-dependence, and easy-going ways are not calculated to make her inferiors respectful, or to restrain impertinence. I think nothing so contrary to dignity as inconsistency.

To-day, kind; to-morrow, unjust,—to-day, a kiss; to-morrow, a blow,—nothing done according to desert, but everything according to the humor of the moment. No authority can be exerted by those who act thus. To look at the Präsidentin's gentle face, and soft, smiling lips, to watch her affectionate, considerate manner, no one would suspect the storms of violence that sometimes come upon her,—beating down the barriers of kind feeling, almost of good breeding. But to return. My friend the Präsidentin seemed much depressed at the prospect of a new servant, that pet horror of all housekeepers.

“It is true,” she said, “that Henrietta was impertinent and deceitful; but she was kind to the children, and I had taught her my ways. Now the whole thing has to be gone through with again.”

When I looked at the first applicant for the vacant situation, I judged that a quarrel with her would turn out a stormy matter, although she spoke in the most measured terms, and, for a woman of her class, used really refined language, talking almost with enthusiasm of her love for children.

“Are you engaged to be married?” asked Frau von Löben, timidly.

“Not at this moment,” was the reply, “as I gave *him* notice when I left my last place. He was employed in the family, but, as they live in the country and I wanted to come into the town, it was too far.”

Delightful frankness! So it was only a question of propinquity.

“I care for no situation where they keep a man-

servant," continued she. "I aspire to something better than a waiter."

To my surprise, Frau von Löben, instead of dismissing the woman at once, said,—

"We only have a man-servant who comes here for a portion of each day."

"How old is he?"

"He has recently celebrated his 'jubilee.'"

"It is a pity we are not allowed to celebrate them also," said the woman. "However, women don't like to acknowledge their age."

She laughed, and Frau von Löben smiled also. I could not but be amazed. The conversation with Henrietta was nothing to this sacrifice of all dignity. Even harsh words are not nearly so bad as this "demeaning ourselves"—I can find no better expression for it—to the level of our inferiors. I can hardly understand Frau von Löben, for it seems to me that she is really of an æsthetic nature; but she is afraid of her servants, and her undignified mode of treating them spoils good ones, and renders her an easy prey to the bad.

"Well, do you think the place will suit you?" said she, almost as though she were asking a favor.

"I will have to think about it. Where is my room?"

Frau von Löben opened the door of a chamber adjoining the kitchen.

"This little hole!" cried the woman, in horror. "Why, it's hardly large enough to turn around in! And where would I put my piano?"

"A piano!" exclaimed Frau von Löben, in despair. "That would never do."

"I and my piano—my piano and I—we always go together," said the servant. "One must have a little pleasure in this world."

"A piano!" cried Arthur. "Take her! take her! do, dear mamma!"

"Take her!" echoed Clärchen.

What a pity the two are brother and sister, and can never be husband and wife! But such marvelous unanimity of sentiment is not often found in married couples.

"Yes, little ones, I'll play for you to dance every evening, and I can sing, too," said the servant.

Frau von Löben's judgment seemed entirely upset by the children's delight, and she was actually on the point of committing the care of the family's bodily needs to this musical monster. But I stepped boldly to the rescue.

"Children," I said, "whenever you want to dance, come to me; I'll play for you. Cooks who play the piano can be of no earthly use to any one."

Frau von Löben gave me a look full of gratitude, but the candidate for office bestowed upon me a withering glance.

"Are you ready, Frau von Löben?" said I.

"Yes,—we will not suit each other; good-morning," she said, courageously.

"Can't I come some other time, when the lady isn't here?" asked the woman.

"I'm always here," I said, with unmoved gravity,

leading Frau von Löben out of her own kitchen. When we got into her sitting-room we both burst into a peal of irrepressible laughter, and I was about to explain my unwarrantable interference, when she interrupted me with earnest thanks for delivering her.

“What would have become of my poor husband with that dreadful jingling from morning to night?—for only think what sort of piano it must be! But do you know, if it hadn’t been for you I should have taken her?”

Can you imagine such childish indecision of character? She ended by retaining the insulted Henrietta at an increase of wages.

“I won’t get a better one. I, at least, know her faults, and the few extra groschen she cheats me out of won’t ruin me.”

I was silent, for I do not choose always to act the part of Mentor. A child’s character cannot easily be entirely altered,—only guided and restrained; but when those to whom this task is confided themselves need a leader, it usually goes ill with their charges. I cannot but notice more and more the thoughtless enjoyment, the objectless levity, the want of practical common sense, that distinguish the whole family. As we are in the midst of the Carnival, entertainments follow one another in rapid succession. That makes little difference to me, for, with the exception of the Löbens, who treat me as one of their own family, and Frau von Schönau, I have formed not a solitary friendship. I have, as yet, received only superficial impressions, and shall wait until they

deepen. I did not come here for society, although it is a difficult thing to dispense with it entirely. Frau von Löben begged me most kindly to pass my unoccupied evenings with them. I agreed to do so, on conditions that I should be treated with no ceremony, and that not the slightest change should be made in their arrangements on my account. I am to share their tea and take part in their reading; and I anticipate much pleasure in this sort of home-life that suits me so entirely. But I have been waiting for "unoccupied evenings,"—not of my own, but of my hostess and her family. Meantime, I go to theatres and concerts, and pass an evening occasionally with Frau von Schönau. The Löbens are engaged at some ball or party almost every night, and if by chance one is left free, it is employed in repaying their obligations,—that is, in inviting those by whom they have been entertained; and, as each party gives rise to a number of new ones, a perfect whirl of dissipation has been the result. I cannot imagine how the husband's feeble health supports this constant strain. They have a numberless amount of acquaintances,—some of them official friends of the President, others made by choice or by chance.

"It is very natural, when you meet persons so often, to be introduced and to exchange visits," said Frau von Löben to me; "but although there are so many one is compelled to invite, that surely should not prevent us from asking those we really wish to see. So, gradually, the circle grows larger and larger; and next winter, when Bertha makes her *début*, it will

be still more extended. The poor child has very little pleasure now, for her approaching confirmation forbids her going out, excepting to small parties."

But Bertha doesn't stay at home on that account.

"Don't you find it difficult to keep the children in order?" I asked her, one day, supposing that she took charge of them while their parents were at parties.

"You don't expect me to stay at home with them?" she exclaimed, in amazement.

She either spends the evening with some of her friends, or they come to see her.

"It is very nice to stay home occasionally, or when you are sick, or old," she once said to me, in her mother's presence.

The latter laughed, and said, "You will think very differently when you are married."

The girl looked at her with genuine incredulity.

"Why, do *you* think differently?" she asked.

I was not surprised at the question. There is no domestic happiness here. How can there be, in this mad carnival season, and with those who devote all their energies to making a satisfactory return for the obligations under which their friends have placed them? But how delightful will it be, at our last hour, to take leave of life with a peaceful conscience, bestowed by the sweet knowledge that we are not indebted to any one, even for a cup of tea! How often do we think of our indebtedness to God, or to ourselves?

Now let me tell you how matters go with the chil-

dren while their parents are plunged in this sea of gayety, and Bertha is amusing herself with her various friends.

The other evening Caroline put her head in at my door in great alarm.

"Come, quickly!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid somebody will be hurt."

I heard, through the open door, a terrible noise, the cries of an excited, angry child, mingled with the shrill voice of a woman. I ran to Frau von Löben's apartments as quickly as possible. As I entered the kitchen door I beheld a real idyllic scene of peaceful enjoyment. Entirely undisturbed by the uproar, three people were sitting around a well-covered tea-table. On it was the family tea-service. Henrietta was doing the honors, and her future (who has one of the worst faces I ever beheld) was contentedly dipping a cake in Frau von Löben's particular cup, while the third—my old acquaintance, Johann Ehrenreich—had slipped on Herr von Löben's handsome morning-gown to protect his own clothes from being soiled or greased. But it was most amusing to see their startled faces, as the three rose to their feet. I remained perfectly still, looking alternately at the tea-service and at Herr von Löben's dressing-gown. The wearer was so thunderstruck that he could not speak, for some time. At last he pointed to the rascally countenance opposite to him, and stammered,—

"That is my best friend!"

"And *that* is Herr von Löben's dressing-gown," replied I. "And—unless you put it on to get your

best friend to help you to beat it thoroughly—I would suggest your putting it back in its place.”

Before I had finished, the coat was off.

“Who is with the children?” I asked Henrietta, for a most singular duet was audible from the nursery. Arthur’s voice was heard repeating, passionately, “It isn’t true!” and the shrill female tones retorting, “It is, I tell you!”

“Fräulein Hulda,” replied Henrietta. “She often stays with them when their father and mother are not at home.”

“Fräulein Hulda?” That is the “sewing-girl” Arthur spoke of. The noise had quieted somewhat when I entered the nursery. Clärchen stood in a corner, sobbing and frightened, and Gertrude seemed striving to comfort her. Fräulein Hulda, crimson with anger, was still in hot contest with Arthur: the very ribbon on her head waved backwards and forwards like a streamer with the violence of her contradiction. The child was stamping with rage, till I really thought that he would burst the leather of his little boots.

“Why don’t you do it with both feet? that’s still prettier,” I said to him. He thought I was in earnest, but fell into a new paroxysm of fury on finding that his violent stamping was thereby changed into mere jumping up and down. Blind with passion, he rushed at Hulda with both little fists clenched; but, ere he could reach her, I had caught him by the wrists, and held him fast. “Aren’t you ashamed?” I said. “Little boys should never strike.”

"It's all because Clärchen wouldn't eat her bread-and-milk, and I stood her in the corner," said Hulda. "He struck me till I saw sparks."

"That's not so!" burst forth Arthur, indignantly. "We are not to tell stories—and she does; for if she really had seen sparks, we could have seen them too."

I quieted the child with some difficulty, and, drawing the bowl of bread-and-milk towards me, sat down and took Clärchen on my lap.

"We'll eat it together, shall we?" I said. "You take a spoonful first, and then I'll take one."

The bread-and-milk was miserably prepared, and really I did not wonder that the child had refused it; but she now began to eat quite obediently, and a little smile dawned through her tears. I sent Hulda off, and remained myself with the children. The room was in dire confusion. Dolls, toys, portions of the children's wardrobe,—everything lay topsy-turvy.

"I will put it in order," said Gertrude. "I won't go to sleep till it's all nicely done."

The honest little face showed her sincerity, but I said that I preferred that the children should do it together. The two younger were more zealous than skilful, but I could not but admire Gertrude's gentle, sisterly way with them. When they had all gone to bed, I called Henrietta, and tried to appeal to her conscience. If it did no good, it at least would do no harm; and if we see people going the wrong path we can surely point them to the right one, if we can do no more. I told her at the same time that I certainly should report the occurrence to her mistress.

I did so. The two delinquents received a sharp reprimand from their employers, and there the matter ended. Johann Ehrenreich fulfils his usual duties, I meet Henrietta's future constantly, coming from visits to his lady-love, and probably they still have their tea-drinkings in style. I have warned the Löbens, but I certainly shall not make a detective officer of myself for their benefit. I have done one thing more; I have begged that the children may be permitted to stay with me when I am at home and their parents are out,—which is, as I have already said, an every-day, or rather every-night, occurrence. They are lovely children, and give me no trouble. Gertrude studies her lessons here, and, when they are learned, brings her doll and occupies herself with that. She is always quietly busy; I scarcely know that she is in the room.

Arthur's favorite amusement is playing soldier, and Clärchen is his army. I open my sleeping-room door, and they march backwards and forwards, Clärchen leading the way, Arthur following with a waving banner, and shouting in the most extraordinary style about king and fatherland, battles and glory, and all the other respectable, old phrases. Unfortunately, Clärchen cannot go as fast as he can, and he occasionally, in his eagerness, runs over her; so she has now adopted the plan of tumbling down voluntarily when she sees no other means of escape. They are devoted to each other, and rarely quarrel; but sometimes they do, and then I have to play peacemaker, and lay aside my book, my work, or the letter I am

writing to you. I have to do so now, for there is a terrible uproar going on. If you only could see me! My quiet is all gone, but my heart is not heavy,—no, it beats as lightly as the children's own; and I wonder more and more at the mother who can care for outside pleasures when such sweet ones lie so near,—where she need only stretch out her hand to pluck these fresh, young blossoms from the tree of life.

FIFTH LETTER.

Do you know whom I like best of all the people here? Old Frau von Schönau. She is very brusque,—more brusque than sharp-tongued,—and her honorable, resolute character forms a great contrast to the insipidity of most society people. I do not mean to uphold roughness of manner or sharpness of tongue; they are far from commendable, and surely especially so in our sex, and usually are, rather, signs of want of good breeding than of strength of intellect, which is perfectly compatible with dignity and refinement. But Frau von Schönau reminds me of a gnarled, old oak-tree among precisely-trimmed hedges. How wonderfully natural does the old tree's knotted trunk appear by contrast, and how picturesque the weather-beaten limbs with their straggling foliage! I think that very often sympathy is discovered instantaneously. If it be not too deeply concealed by conventionalities, this accord is felt on the first contact; and we should strive to keep it up, in spite of the disappointments or dissensions that may arise on a closer acquaintance; for from this sympathy a strong, real friendship may arise. It is true that it needs some character to draw closer this bond of attachment and not to let it slip from our hold; for, although it is with the heart that we form attach-

ments, it is not with the heart that we retain them. The heart is a very vacillating, wavering organ, depending on the impression of the moment, and should be inclosed in character as in a locket. Natures lacking this, love, to-day hotly, to-morrow less so, the next day not at all, then more passionately than ever, according to the mood of the moment, wanting the firm conviction of the worthiness of their love, the strong, quiet belief in its object. There is no dependence on these unreasoning but tender natures, which, chameleon-like, take the color of whatever object they approach, but lose that color when separated from it. Rather give me brusque, honest words, with a grasp of the hand,—an honest, hearty grasp; not the fashionable touch of the finger-tips, which makes one feel as if one's hand were a frog or a toad, to be touched only with unwillingness and disgust.

Since I met Frau von Schöнау I have become compelled to wear my seal ring on my left hand.

The old lady is a widow, lives entirely alone, and has no means save her widow's allowance. She would not take the advice of her husband's friends, and petition the king for an extra pension.

"The poor man has enough to give to," was her unselfish, characteristic reply. "I will neither be one of the rejected petitioners myself, nor the involuntary cause of having others rejected. I will cut my dresses shorter, and not let them sweep the pavements, and then they will last longer. I will manage to get along."

She occupies charming little apartments in a good

neighborhood, and not high up, which would be inconvenient for her; but they are back rooms, which of course reduces the rent amazingly. Do you know that this is considered quite disgraceful in her, and many of her acquaintances have ceased to visit her, because they look upon it as derogatory to their dignity to mount the back-stairs to see an honest woman who cuts her coat according to her cloth? She is pleasantly and comfortably, though not luxuriously, arranged. It is the same with her wardrobe. It is of plain, dark stuffs, and not at all conformed to the extravagancies of fashion. Her manner of life is simple; her expenses are kept strictly within bounds, so as to allow her the luxury of a maid. When her husband died, she discharged all her servants, and supplied their place with a little girl selected from among the orphans at the asylum. Whether it be that her choice was a good one, or whether it be that she has only her own admirable training to thank, certain it is that the maid has turned out a modest, efficient little servant. She has her work-table in her mistress's room, takes her meals with her, and at night they read or work together by the light of the same lamp. This, too, is thought most unbecoming conduct; and many who would have borne with the back-stairs even, declared that "this was really too much." Frau von Schönau only laughs, and says,—

"Whoever doesn't choose to come can stay away."

It is only natural, however, that these circumstances should affect her judgment of men and things. She is distantly connected with the President, and all his

children call her "aunt." He esteems her most highly; his wife is truly fond of her, although she tries to reason her out of her breaches of etiquette; and with the children she is on the most friendly terms. She is especially attached to Dietrich and Joachim: one reason of this is that she believes them in more peril from the pernicious ideas of the age than are the girls. She may be right. A young man must have great difficulty in retaining nowadays his individuality of opinion and character without allowing them to be affected by outside influences. Education might do much towards counteracting these influences, but usually is their most powerful ally.

"Education!" my old friend says. "Good precept and bad example is education. Modern ways and ideas are like dragons; whosoever falls unarmed into their clutches will feel their sharp fangs to the very bone. Nowadays morality goes clad in a silken garment, instead of an impenetrable panoply. True men and women are but rarely met with. Words pass for deeds, shadows for substance, spoiled and petted sons and daughters of fashion are the founders and guiders of the rising generation. Children,"—she meant Joachim and Dietrich,—“be exceptions to the rule; and you, Bertha, take Gertrude for an example. She promises to become a true woman,—quiet, gentle, unaffected, and industrious, full of care and thoughtfulness for others: the house that calls her mistress will be a *home*,—not a booth at a fair, full of tinsel and glitter.”

The children are deeply attached to her, in spite

of these long lectures, which is the best proof of her true kindness and philanthropy. I enjoy my intercourse with her extremely, and take the greatest pleasure in the quiet hours we pass together. She enlarges my views and my knowledge of life by her extended sympathies and experience. She passed yesterday evening with me; we took coffee with Frau von Löben, and then, as she and her husband were going to a party, Frau von Schönau and myself adjourned to my rooms. We had enjoyed our chat very much with the Präsidentin, although my old friend told her that her coffee was miserable, and divined from the coffee-grounds that she took no trouble about her housekeeping and had a bad cook. As my old friend and I sat at tea, Joachim's light, quick step was heard on the stairs, as he bounded up singing,—

“Since I looked upon her, sight has fled from me.”

“*Sense* has fled from me,” said Frau von Schönau. “Here comes a fool in embryo.”

Caroline opened the door, and we heard her say to him,—

“You had better come and take tea with the Fräulein, young sir. Your sister has company, and your father and mother are out. Supper is over, but we can find you something to eat——”

“Eat! Caroline, you have never loved!” And he rushed up-stairs to his own room.

“I don't see what that has to do with supper,” was audible, in rather offended accents, as Caroline closed

the door. My old friend and I burst into a hearty peal of laughter. This reminds me to tell you of Joachim's latest flame. According to family tradition, from his sixth year he has been in love, in rapid succession, with every imaginable specimen of the opposite sex, of every possible age and position. The present sovereign of his heart is the wife of the English ambassador. Naturally, he worships merely from a distance,—usually from the street-corners, or from among the crowd of idlers who, on court-days, assemble before her residence to see the beautiful Englishwoman enter her carriage. It is the most innocent adoration imaginable,—though a somewhat expensive one, as it drives poor Joachim to visiting concerts and theatres, whither he goes, dressed in the most elaborate fashion, in hopes of having a glimpse of his charmer. More than once the boy has had the impudence to send her, anonymously, magnificent bouquets, arranged by the most fashionable florist here. I don't know whether he intends to send his photograph some day in one of these floral tributes, but he certainly has his picture taken every week or so, and in the most varied and astonishing attitudes of which the human frame is capable. When he studies, I don't know. His pocket-money must be entirely spent at the photographer's. I believe his mother pays for his concert- and theatre-tickets.

But a youth of sixteen cannot live on love, as was shortly proved to us, for in ten minutes Joachim was down-stairs again.

"I thought you'd change your mind," was Caro-

line's greeting to him: "so I haven't cleared off yet. Go right in: the Frau Geheimeräthin is with the Fräulein."

He knocked at the door, and, opening it, sang, in a drawling tone,—

"To a ball my parents both have gone,
And have left me here at home alone;
There is no supper at all for me,
And I'm as hungry as I can be,"

and came laughingly in.

"Cold roast beef—delightful!" he exclaimed, eyeing my table with the air of a connoisseur.

"Yes," said Frau von Schönau, "once a gay young calf like you. So there you see the end of all things——"

"Of all calves, you mean," laughed Joachim.

The old lady did not allow herself to be checked; but it did not in the least affect the boy's appetite,—one piece of roast beef after another disappeared. At last he folded his napkin carefully and laid it aside. The old lady had come to a momentary pause in her lecture. Joachim put a sudden termination to it by half singing, half declaiming,—

"Croak! Croak! Croak!
'Tis a hundred years since I was young;
I've quite forgotten how it feels,
Or I'd not tease young people at their meals."

The old lady pulled his hair.

"Ne'er-do-weel!" she said. "Call my words mere croaking if you choose; but, if I *be* an old croaker, I only do my duty in giving warning of the morass,

that so fine a gentleman as you may not be sunk in its depths. I have seen still finer ones lost in it."

Joachim laughed; but his laugh sounded forced, and when she had gone he gave vent to his anger.

"She really *is* an old croaker," he said. "She cannot understand a young man's nature. No woman can: so——" He paused.

"Go on," I said, laughing. "Give us the benefit of your experience."

"So women had better not trouble themselves about young men at all. If I really were in debt, which she seems to imagine, I certainly should not tell her, to have her rush off with the news to my father and mother and distress them uselessly. I am no child! I shall permit no one to interfere in my affairs."

"I never would dream of doing such a thing," I replied, greatly amused.

He blushed, laughed confusedly, kissed my hand, paid some compliment to my "good sense," and bade me good-evening.

"'Tis to me all one, 'tis to me all one,
Whether I've money or have none,"

I heard him singing up in his room. I have no objections to the song; for surely nothing should be of less consequence to a sixteen-year-old boy than money. He who has nothing should spend nothing. But that is not always the case. A feeling of anxiety and care arose in my heart. Care! Yes, care is the inseparable companion of family-life. And yet I wanted to part with care. It almost seems to me as though in doing that I should part with joy also.

Joy and Care! What are they but a sort of Janus? We cannot cross the sacred threshold leading to this domestic happiness without sacrificing to the two-faced deity. If we close our eyes to the sad countenance, we close them to the joyful one also.

Joy and Care! everywhere they go hand-in-hand, and their alternate reign makes up the sum of our mortal life. In our hearts, in our homes, in the world, rule the coequal sovereigns; but in heaven, Care will be deposed, and Joy will reign for ever and ever.

SIXTH LETTER.

WHEN I went into the Löbens' rooms to-day, I found the young people in great excitement over a half-jesting, half-serious quarrel,—if a quarrel can ever be a jesting one. Sometimes it hovers upon the boundary; but even then a thoughtless word can send it over the line. Fortunately, that was not the case here.

“Jackanapes!” said Joachim to Bertha, as I came in, interrupting by this not particularly elegant expression a half-laughing discussion between Dietrich and Bertha, which the latter seemed on the point of changing into a serious one. “Jackanapes!” He said it so drolly that every one burst out laughing, save Bertha, who turned to him angrily.

“On the mother’s or the father’s side?” she retorted. “You strike yourself in aiming at me!”

“Well, my charge was all right, but the gun missed fire,” said the unabashed Joachim, coolly. “I wasn’t speaking of personal appearance,—only of mental qualities. But, now, come and ask my pardon!”

Every one had to laugh at this; even Bertha forgot her indignation at the appellation bestowed upon her.

The discussion between Dietrich and Bertha was a rather absurd one. Bertha had expressed her great desire to be a man. I think almost all young girls

experience, some time or other, this feeling of discontent with their sex. It is the longing for the freedom which they imagine the opposite sex to enjoy. Home seems so narrow,—their world so small. Everywhere they are restrained by petty conventionalities; and that is not all,—at least with imaginative characters: they admire the higher nature, as they suppose it to be, of man. For they see beings of their own creation, not men as they really are, and ascribe to them the noble qualities which exist only in their own idea. Their beau-idéal prefers ugly virtue to mere beauty, dances with all the wall-flowers at balls, without regard to age or appearance, never loves but once, and marries only for love. I give Bertha's own words.

"If I only were a man!" she exclaimed, with sparkling eyes. "To be a girl is too horrid!"

"To be a horrid girl, certainly is," replied Dietrich; "but a rich, beautiful, and charming one,—why not?"

"For some man to marry? That's all we're good for."

"Very often not even for that," said Dietrich, laughing.

"If I were a man, I know whom I should marry," continued Bertha, thoughtfully.

"Your tall friend Elsie, I suppose," said Joachim. "Don't you remember her?" he continued, turning to me. "That beanpole that my brother danced with the other night? It was real self-sacrifice on his part; for she's a head taller than he is, and her bones rattle like drumsticks as she dances."

"She is worth you two together," said Bertha, with sovereign contempt. "She is ugly, I acknowledge; but when you know her, you forget her ugliness. Only you men don't think in that way."

"Be a man first, and then give your opinion," said Joachim.

"Elsie certainly is a most excellent girl," said Frau von Löben.

"Mother," said Joachim, "it makes me shiver to hear that expression! I know all about the 'excellent girls' that all the mothers want for daughters-in-law. From their third year they took entire charge of the housekeeping, mended their little brothers' and sisters' stockings, and gave them moral lectures. They are propriety itself,—never speak ill of any one, stand up for the maligned, and couldn't make a joke to save their lives. They sit up just as straight in church on Sunday as they do on the sofa at home, and never change their position. No, indeed, mamma; when you say an 'excellent girl,' with that peculiar expression, I know at once she's a scarecrow; and Bertha may say what she pleases, she *wouldn't* marry her if she were a man."

"But it wasn't on account of marriage I wanted to be a man," replied Bertha. "It's because I want to enjoy myself, and be just as wild and merry as I choose. With us, it's always, 'This isn't proper,' and 'That is not the thing,'—the horrible 'proprieties' block up every path. Nobody asks Dietrich about what he does. If I were a man I'd join the hus-sars——"

"My regiment?" asked Dietrich.

"Yes; that is the nicest one."

"I wouldn't permit it," jested Dietrich.

"I wouldn't ask your permission," she replied.

"What!" he continued, "allow myself to be made old by having a younger brother in the same regiment, and have to look after him besides? No, indeed!"

"I should not give you that trouble, I assure you!" exclaimed Bertha.

"It couldn't be otherwise," insisted Dietrich. "We would lodge together; I should keep a tight rein over you; I would take charge of your money; you shouldn't have any night-key, and would have to be home at ten o'clock."

Bertha had listened, half amused, half angry; but the last clause brought her completely at bay.

"I wouldn't be your slave! I'd have my own night-key, and come and go as I chose."

A ridiculous squabble over the night-key ensued, and Bertha became so excited that one easily might have imagined her, as she seemed to imagine herself, a young ensign defending his rights against a domineering lieutenant-brother, until Joachim's exclamation of "Jackanapes!" recalled the young girl to herself.

The world is full of dissensions over as trifling subjects as this; only, unfortunately, these quarrels are not always confined to the home-circle, and are not so laughable as this one. All the anger and bitterness in the world, the strife between individuals,

the struggles of the many, could they but be traced back to first causes, spring from almost as trifling sources as this. Strife, or, to speak more correctly, contest, is, I think, a necessity; powers are thereby strengthened, which in quiet, resistless sufferance would lose their force. The President often seems to me an example of this loss of power, and the impression is deepened as I see more of him in his own home, and see how even the crowning blessing of life—the happiness of loving and being loved—lies like a weight upon his shoulders. His wife is his treasure; the object of his life is to make hers a happy one. Therefore he yields to her love of society, and, to spare her strength for it, takes upon himself as much of the household cares as a man with dignity can,—perhaps more. He is, of course, owing to his position, much occupied, and is absent for a great part of the day. He attends to a large portion of his business in the early morning, to avoid disturbing his wife's company in the evening; so he is compelled to rise extremely early. Gertrude prepares his coffee for him. Always quietly obliging, and thoughtful of others, she is, in her small way, a true woman. Frau von Löben sleeps late,—she is nervous, and cannot stand early rising. Her excitable nature is equally opposed to going early to rest, and she thinks it very strange that her husband is unwilling to sit up two or three hours after returning late with her from a party.

“He used to read aloud to me until I was sleepy,” she said. “But now his voice is too weak. At least,

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that is the excuse he makes," she added, confidentially; "but I think the truth is, he prefers going to bed."

I said something about his delicate health requiring some care.

"Do you think him delicate?" she asked, anxiously.

I did not know what answer to make, so shrugged my shoulders in lieu of reply.

"He appears so to you, I suppose, as he does to every stranger," she said, trying to reassure herself; "but he has always been thin, and has had that cough for a long time: it is not a dangerous cough at all. He looks delicate, but his constitution is very strong. If I did not know that, I should be worried to death about him. I don't believe I could live—I should go mad, if Heaven took him from me."

"Don't tempt Providence by calling its rights in question," I said, involuntarily.

Again the look of deep anxiety overspread her face, and she answered,—

"I do not wish to do so; but I cannot believe that God would take from me my dearest treasure. I have that firm confidence; it will not be disappointed. Oh, what a conversation!" she said, giving herself a little shake, as if to shake off all anxiety and care. "I don't like to talk about such things. It makes me ill."

Her husband entered at this moment; she fell sobbing into his arms. He was shocked and surprised.

"*Are* you sick?" she asked. "Is there any cause

for me to be anxious about you? Don't work so much. Give up your office——”

“My child,” he interrupted, “what are you distressing yourself so about? Nothing is the matter with me. Be happy and enjoy yourself while you can. When sorrow comes will be soon enough to think of it.”

“You are right,” she said.

I think he is *not* right. Such a contradictory nature, such a vacillating character, such a superficial spirit, should not be thus coaxed and soothed like a child. No, she needs discipline to call up her slumbering powers. The eye that has gazed only on the bright side of life shrinks appalled from the gathering darkness. The foot from whose pathway every stone has been removed will stumble at last over a grain of sand. He is doing wrong; and I told him so, plainly, when he took occasion to beg me to divert his wife's mind from all gloomy thoughts.

“I love to see her happy, and if sad days be in store for her, they will come soon enough. Why should we anticipate them? I may live many years longer. My disease is not necessarily fatal. I have heard of cases of consumption being cured in people older than myself. I am so necessary to my family,” he continued. “My children cannot spare me; they are all unprovided for, as yet; and how would my wife even pay for the education of the little ones out of a widow's pension, not to speak of the great expense of living nowadays?”

I could scarcely conceal my surprise. Did he really

mean that his salary was his sole possession, and that he had absolutely nothing to leave his family? Then what madness to live fully up to his income, to accustom his children to every luxury, and to bring them up ignorant of such a thing as self-denial! But is it self-denial to wear calico instead of silk? to give up this mad carnival dissipation, ruinous alike to health and to the taste for quieter enjoyments, and to content oneself with pleasures more reasonable and more suitable for youth? Is it a disadvantage for a young girl to offer by her simple, fresh attire a contrast to her bedizened friends and companions? Does maidenhood need these costly ornaments? Is not a sparkling eye more beautiful than a brilliant diamond? an innocent, happy smile purer than the most precious pearl? Does it render a young girl less charming if, amid the superficial and conventional intercourse of society, she accidentally reveal a treasure of higher sentiments and deeper feelings, which, instinctively, she has striven to conceal from those who could not appreciate them? Is it a disgrace to the little hand in its spotless glove if at home it is active in preserving the grace and beauty of home, in making small means go further, or in providing for itself the pleasures that young hearts enjoy so much? There is a strange contradiction in the fact that so much is made of the elegance and comfort of home, when the very means are neglected which would supply them even in the lack of large fortunes. Why, one could count the girls who make or mend their own clothes or dresses, knitting is totally abolished, and either a

servant or the harassed mother undertakes what formerly would have been the daughter's greatest pride. How can they find time for such homely occupations amid concerts, balls, suppers, and all this fever for pleasure? How can they succeed in cultivating a germ of industry amid the rank growth of mental idleness? I think even wealthy parents are much to blame in permitting their children's future happiness and position to depend on the uncertain basis of riches, and in omitting to give them a nobler dowry,—one that puts to shame mere gold and silver, for it can do far more; it can secure content. But the father whose sole income is his salary, the mother who loses in her husband the provider,—how must *they* look forward to death, knowing that their children have been brought up unable to deny themselves luxuries which they will have no means to obtain! How must they feel, in contemplating the uncertain future of their daughters, the unsafe pathway their sons are treading! How often is a frivolous, thoughtless youth followed by a loveless, lonely, sorrowful old age! Poor girls rarely marry nowadays. Men require too much, and women can do too little. Even love keeps step with the ideas of the day, and material worth far outweighs moral in the scales. Then what is to become of the young girls whose happiness, as well as their position, depends thus as it were on chance? Noble natures may struggle through and find their place at last; for there is a place for all of us in the world, if we can only find it; and to make this easier is the task

of a sensible bringing-up. Build up sound minds in children, by training them to moderation; teach them not to look upon self-denial as a martyrdom, but to regard content as daily bread and pleasure as the exception, to distinguish show from beauty, to implant trust in the Creator and trust in their own strength, love of activity, and love of order in activity,—I mean to preserve it from aimlessness: thus armed, they may go forth to the battle of life sure of victory.

I repeat to you almost word for word a conversation which I had with Frau von Löben, and which I brought about intentionally; for I will at least strive to sow the good seed, even though it should never bear fruit. Frau von Löben agreed with me in all my views, but then added, in the most *naïve* manner,—

“But, if this is to be done, we should have to isolate ourselves, and live like hermits; and that would never do. Bertha is going to be very pretty. Should I withdraw her from the world? Then she would lose all chance of marrying well,—the chief consideration for a girl. To live in the world and be regardless of its customs is impossible, also. And it’s bad enough not to be rich, but is that any reason why we should not associate with those who are? And that compels a certain degree of extravagance.”

I said I did not see how it compelled it; for surely the pleasure in mutual intercourse was not lessened by the fact of living within one’s means.

“But,” she answered, “I cannot offer a cup of

tea to those who give me oysters and champagne. I should die of mortification. You wouldn't do it, either."

"I don't know," I answered; "but I think I would not let these ideas govern my choice of society. People are thrown together; they have their customs and manners of life, regulated by taste and by circumstances. I share those of my friends and acquaintances; they in turn share mine. Social intercourse should be a pleasure, a relaxation,—not a burden."

"People have not all the same views," she answered. "Different experiences bring about different conclusions. My husband's position decides my friends, and fashion decides the mode of our reciprocal entertainments. I cannot depart from the rule of all my circle, and surely cannot require Bertha to be different from her young friends. It is apt to cause a feeling of bitterness. I often say to her, 'You are not rich; you can't have what rich girls have; and it makes little difference if you have a necklace or a bracelet more or less, if you have as many as are necessary.'"

I could not help asking, rather sarcastically, "And what is the necessary number of bracelets, for instance?"

She took the question entirely seriously, and answered,—

"Well, now that they wear open sleeves, one on each arm is absolutely required. When they wore coat-sleeves it made less difference."

I broke off the conversation, feeling that it was

mere waste of words. I am heartily sorry for the children; for I see what distorted ideas of poverty and riches, and what false shame, are daily instilled into them. I will at least try to be of some use to the little ones, for Bertha has no fancy for me, and as for the two eldest boys, I am not yet zealous enough to seek in officers of the Guards and young students converts to my theory of moderation. I only hope life may not prove a hard schoolmaster to them. I take deep interest in all the children. Their natural originality of character offers a happy contrast to the folly with which they are surrounded.

"My niece regards the children as created solely for her pleasure," said Frau von Schönau to me, the other day. "She is pleased with everything they do. If Dietrich lives in so extravagant a style that it is impossible for him to keep out of debt, she admires his grace and popularity; the cadet's lips are kissed for each new impertinence they utter; and as for Joachim and his English lady——! Well, the pitcher goes often to the spring, but it is broken at last; and when it is broken——"

"When it is broken," I interrupted, "we may still dip up a sweet draught with the fragments, and feel that *it* is worth far more than the perishable vessel."

SEVENTH LETTER.

You remember my fondness for family portraits. Even if we do not know the originals, and if the time in which they lived be long past, yet it is a pleasure to gaze on the features which seem to look back with such composure, challenging us, as it were, to read their history in their faces. Not long since, I was in the President's apartment, whither Frau von Löben took me to see a very beautiful arm-chair which she had embroidered for her husband. The gift was another proof of her singular childishness, but rather the want of reflection than the youthful simplicity peculiar to childhood. The cushions are of rich and elaborate bead-work. The princess of the fairy-tale, who felt the solitary pea under the heap of mattresses, would not have found this a comfortable resting-place; and when Frau von Löben told me that her husband was so much attached to his old arm-chair that he could not make up his mind to replace it by the new one, I easily imagined the cause of his unwillingness. The poor man is as thin as a skeleton, and his wife, in the kindness of his heart, works him a chair in beads!

I soon exhausted my admiration of the useless and beautiful piece of furniture, and turned with more interest to the portraits on the wall. There were pictures of celebrated statesmen and scholars,

youthful friends of the President, and others. There were photographs and daguerreotypes of the children, and a handsome painting of Frau von Löben, taken in her youth, and another of her husband, painted at about the same time. I could easily satisfy Frau von Löben's desire that I should admire the portrait of her husband; he must have been a very handsome man ere ill health had altered him. A portrait of his first wife hung over his writing-table; it was almost concealed by a lamp placed before it,—an arrangement of Frau von Löben's, as she confided to me, lest he should forget his second wife in contemplating the portrait of his first. I could not but admire the gentle, kindly expression, but was much amused with another picture, evidently taken when daguerreotypes were first invented. It was that of a middle-aged woman; she sat upright, in appalling stiffness; her features were cloudy, her eyes had neither color, light, nor expression; one hand grasped a little table by her side, the other a book which lay in her lap. It was the portrait of a widowed sister-in-law of the President, on whom rest the family expectations. She is rich, has the liver-complaint, and is disgusted with life and its frivolous pursuits and pleasures. But those who are weary of life are not always the first to die, and those who are disgusted with the world are, if the truth were but known, not generally in such a hurry to quit it. Her grief for the early death of her husband, for whom she still wears mourning, only increases with time, and, it appears, has caused her misanthropic turn of mind. At least

so say her two eldest nephews, who, when I met them on the train, were just returning from a visit to her. She possesses, besides her income, a handsome estate. It is said that her husband desired this to become the property of his nephew Dietrich at her death, and, from the aunt's constant complaints of the difficulties attending the management of so large a property, Frau von Löben's sanguine nature hopes that she may conclude to present it to the young man during her lifetime. Her maiden name was Deckler; Frau von Löben pronounces it "de Clair," leaving her hearers to recognize therein, if they can, the name of a well-known manufacturer.

I suppose you have heard enough about the aunt; so now I shall tell you a long story about Herr von Löben's mother. Her portrait hangs over the sofa, and is so speaking a picture that involuntarily I felt convinced that it was an excellent likeness. A handsome, intelligent, proud, grave face, iron firmness written on every feature, eyes that look almost defiantly at the observer, and yet with a certain sorrowful expression beneath their defiance. Love for love, hate for hate, unforgiving, unforgetting; so I read her character. Whether my conclusions were correct, you shall judge for yourself. She did not marry until quite late in life. She had been early left an orphan, and, until a few years before her marriage, lived with her stepbrother, who was younger than herself. Though they did not even bear the same name, there was sincere love and sympathy between them. Elizabeth was only a few years older than

Alexander; but those few years, and the earlier maturity of her sex, made her hold a sort of authority over him. This, of course, ceased when he attained majority, and she changed the authority of elder sister for that of mistress of his house. What I am about to relate was first made known to her children through a journal found after her death, and was the first intimation they had of the circumstances which had deeply affected their mother's life.

When quite young, and happy in their mutual affection, the two had exchanged a vow never to marry. She was poor, he was rich, and thus they could enjoy life together. He would undertake the charge of her means, as well as of his own; she would care for his domestic affairs; both looked forward to a happy life together, and rejoiced in the wisdom of their singular plan. Whether Elizabeth was naturally indifferent to men, or whether it was merely by chance that Alexander was the first to recognize the impossibility of keeping the rash vow, I do not know. But it *was* the brother who first discovered that there had been a void in his heart which the sister's love could not satisfy, and that that void was now filled. It was both right and natural for him to seek Elizabeth as the confidante of his sudden passion, feeling sure that she would sympathize with him, and proving his confidence in the strength of their mutual affection by this trust in her. He was mistaken. Elizabeth's first feeling was disappointment. She declared herself deeply wounded and most unjustly treated, and that he offered her a beggar's portion for

the wealth of love which he owed to her. Accustomed to frankness of speech, and forgetful of his feelings, she burst forth into reproaches and lamentations, telling him that such a step would deprive her of the place which she had been taught to regard as her own, and which their mutual vow secured to her. It is strange how easily we are blinded with passion, and how, when we have formed an opinion beforehand, every circumstance is distorted to confirm us in it. From Elizabeth's own account (and she gives the conversation as it occurred, only afterwards adding her own false conclusions), nothing could have been more affectionate, gentle, and considerate than Alexander's conduct in his difficult position. It is easy to perceive the shock he felt at the unexpected chasm which opened between them. One cannot but recoil from the egotistical obstinacy which would have compelled his fulfilment of the rash and unreasonable vow; and it is not hard to comprehend how this first misunderstanding, this opposing view of the most sacred duties and interests, finally grew to a complete estrangement. He told her frankly the goal at which he aimed; hers was in the opposite direction. Can any one blame him for refusing to believe that the winding by-path of intrigue could ever lead to any worthy object? Fate had willed that Alexander's love was won by Elizabeth's most intimate friend, the daughter of the owner of a neighboring estate. The girl was much younger than Elizabeth, and was in many things very deferential to her friend. Her heart had for a long time ceased to be her own, but

she had required a solemn promise from Elizabeth never to betray the secret confided to her. Even when her brother told her of his attachment, she felt bound to say nothing of this, and, consequently, her assurances that she knew he would be rejected, her advice that he should conquer his attachment, for which, however, she refused to give any grounds, rendered him suspicious. He questioned her closely, but she evaded a reply.

"Very well," he said, at last; "I know your reasons; your love is a selfish one. You are unwilling for me to marry? Yes or no?"

"Yes," she replied, without a moment's thought.

The brother said not a word more, but at once sought the hand of the young girl he loved, to the delight of her parents and to her own great distress. She begged Elizabeth for assistance, still withholding her permission to inform Alexander of her previous attachment. Feminine delicacy, and many other reasons, most of them utterly groundless, rendered that course repugnant to her. She was unwilling to betray her secret, and unwilling to give an answer where no direct question had as yet been asked. She hoped that he would understand the truth from her manner; but Alexander was blinded by his own attachment; her parents' reception of him was so favorable, her own conduct so hesitating and uncertain, that, as Elizabeth herself says, it was not difficult to construe it encouragingly. And when she attempted to explain its true meaning to her brother, he only replied by a cold smile, and a request that she

would not interfere. At last Elizabeth took a desperate resolution. She wrote to the object of her friend's attachment, explaining the whole matter. The letter was put into the hands of a servant to post. A note of her brother's, as it happened, had been forgotten. Alexander rode after the messenger, overtook him, and in placing his own letter in the mail-bag saw that of his sister. He read the address, was surprised at her writing to a person with whom he knew she had but little acquaintance, and determined to ask her about it on his return, but forgot to do so. He never thought of it again until he read the notice of his young neighbor's betrothal to the man to whom Elizabeth had written. Trembling with excitement, and commanding himself with difficulty, he went, with the notice in his hand, to his sister, and coldly and briefly explained to her his suspicions.

"You wrote to this man some time since. Do not deny it. I saw the letter. Is this," pointing to the notice in his hand, "the result of that letter?"

She assented without hesitation, and without explaining the cause of her action, which she was too proud to do. He threw the paper at her feet, exclaiming,—

"Intriguer! selfish intriguer! Your love I now fully understand and appreciate. It was a mere speculation, an unworthy thirst for power!"

He left the room. A few moments afterwards, she heard the sound of his horse's hoofs, and hastened to the window; he was just riding away, and she never saw him again. She never forgave or forgot the in-

justice, although it had arisen from a mistake, and although the offender was the one she loved best in the world. She quitted their home the same day, and went to the house of an old friend, where she remained while making the necessary arrangements to obtain possession of her little patrimony and to carry out the line of conduct she had decided upon. She wrote a farewell to her brother, still without giving any explanation.

“That I am no selfish intriguer I will prove. I wish nothing from you ; neither love, nor those things that love gives and receives without thinking of their value. What I did was right. I would do the same again. You alone are the offender. You alone, who added insult to a broken word ! Farewell forever !”

She sent the letter, and departed for England, where she soon obtained a situation as governess, for which her education fitted her most admirably. She was fortunate in being in a family where her worth was appreciated, and where a position was given her not often vouchsafed in England to governesses. When her office as instructress was finished, the family begged her to remain with them as friend and companion. Her pride restrained her ; it was mightier than her tenderer instincts, for the reproach of selfishness still lay bitterly on her heart. She weighed everything on an exact scale, and received nothing that she could not repay. Friendship for friendship, well and good ; but a life of ease and enjoyment in a wealthy home, that was what she could not return, and so the bargain (for thus she regarded it) was

not concluded. Her brothers never-forgotten insult made her establish a false system of self judgment. She did not perceive the exposed place where his sharp words justly struck home; it was against other points that she armed herself. Not recognizing the fact that love can be selfish, she directed all her warfare against that lower, meaner type of selfishness which enriches itself at the expense of others. That she really was selfish in her love never struck her, but the dread lest she might appear so in worldly matters drove her forth once again among strangers.

About this time she met with an attaché of one of the legations; he, fascinated by her beauty and intelligence, offered her his hand, and her heart, feeling for the first time the glow of passion, learned at last the whole purifying, ennobling might of a real love. "Heart for heart,"—she could calculate no longer! One would imagine that now her own attachment would teach her to forgive her brother's apparent breach of faith,—but no! Enveloped and bound up in her own web of false reasoning, she still clung to her obstinate self-righteousness, and said to herself, "I am free, he was not. I would have kept my vow, not from 'selfish speculation,' but because I had pledged my word; nay, more, my heart would have craved no love save his."

So she married. She lived in England for a long time, and both her sons were born there. Her husband had a brilliant career, became ambassador, and his wife's position was a prominent one. Her diary contains most interesting accounts of her sojourn at

the various courts. The early tragedy of her life seems almost forgotten. When her brother's name is mentioned, it is always with triumphant reflections on the brilliancy of that life which his unkindness had at one time threatened to blight forever. Not once does she express the wish to see him again, or to be reconciled to him. On the contrary, she expresses her satisfaction that they have never met, and that her residence in a foreign country renders their so doing improbable. For her he is dead, and she even rejoices that, from the dissimilarity of their names, no one would be apt to suspect relationship. She, of course, confided the whole affair to her husband, but demanded from him a promise that he would reject all overtures of reconciliation; and that promise she required him to repeat by the cradle of their eldest child. She wished to be more separated from Alexander than ever, if possible, lest he should again reproach her with selfish designs on his large fortune,—this time for the sake of her son. She firmly resolved never to permit any acquaintance between her children and her “nearest and dearest living relative,” as she had formerly called Alexander. She was the last of her line, and the family name died with her.

It was somewhat inconsistent with her stern, relentless conduct that, although she never spoke of Alexander to her children, she did not destroy the journal through which they might learn of him. It almost seems as though she desired the feud to be buried with her; although no word or hint in the book justifies this surmise. The records close at the

death of her husband. The last line is written in a trembling hand; it is the day and the hour of his decease.

The rest of the story Frau von Löben told me. Elizabeth returned to Germany, and, for her sons' sake, dwelt in one of the largest towns, but never laid aside her mourning, and never entered society again. Her husband had left her in straitened circumstances, and she pinched herself to the uttermost to advance the education of her sons. She was everything to them,—mother, Mentor, friend. She guided their steps, and followed them when they no longer required guidance. They well repaid her care. She lived until the birth of her three eldest grandchildren; then the death-angel came, and stilled a heart that had in many ways been a kind and a warm one,—in whose hate and revenge, even, there lingered a spark of that love which had kindled both. Its treasures had been condemned as counterfeit, and never did it recover from the bankruptcy which it experienced amid the wealth and splendor of youth and the extravagance of affection. The unexplained misunderstanding, the unpardoned injustice, are buried in her grave, and doubtless she now sees and mourns over her own hardness of heart and short-sightedness. She died in the full enjoyment of all her faculties. Her children's worldly inheritance was small, and certainly the one whom I know has little of the strength of character and consistency that, properly used, make a man, to some degree, the arbiter of his fortunes. Whether she had forgotten the diary,

postponed its destruction, or purposely left open to her children the path she had refused to tread, no one can tell. Both brothers agreed to take no steps in the matter, and, consequently, instituted no inquiries for the uncle whose name even was unknown to them. Indeed, Herr von Löben was very desirous of having the journal destroyed, but his wife protested, and her coaxing caresses, as usual, carried the day. I learned all this from Frau von Löben, who read the journal to me on seeing my admiration of Elizabeth's portrait. I had not made any remonstrance as to the propriety of the proceeding beforehand, and, of course, could not do so afterwards. Certainly in the President's gentle heart there is no trace of the old enmity; and as for the children, you can judge for yourself, from the conversation which followed their mother's recital.

"If she wasn't my grandmother, and wasn't dead," said Joachim, who always uses that form when criticising authorities, "I'd say she ought to have been ashamed of her pride, which did nobody any good, and of her revenge, which did her innocent grandchildren so much harm. I am sure our granduncle is a jolly old fellow."

"Joachim!" said his mother, "how can you talk so disrespectfully?"

But she laughed as she said it, and he composedly replied,—

"I'm not talking of my grandmother; I only say what I would think if she *wasn't* my grandmother. And as for my uncle, I'm certain he'd have no objections to being called a 'jolly old fellow;' I'm sure

jolly fellows are better than poor fellows,—and that's what we're going to be, unless we find our rich uncle, or unless our disconsolate aunt, who is so tired of life, concludes to quit it."

"Disconsolate widows are much more apt to marry again than to die," said I, maliciously.

"Very likely; an old bachelor like myself is no judge of such matters," replied the little imp. And Frau von Löben added,—

"She won't marry again; her husband has been dead three years, and she is still in deep mourning. She is a better chance for us than the uncle, who, I suppose, will never turn up, and who, besides, has probably married."

But Bertha protested that this was impossible. The unknown uncle is her beau-idéal, and she declares herself sure that he has remained faithful to his first love.

A portrait which was found among his sister's papers, and which, although she says nothing about it, is supposed to be that of Alexander, Bertha has, to quote Joachim, "confiscated," and keeps it among her little treasures. She brought it for me to see. The face was strangely familiar, and I am sure I must have seen it somewhere. I am not apt to indulge in romantic dreams, either waking or sleeping, but those grave, deep eyes I have either seen or dreamed. I must have met with the original, but where I cannot imagine. Bertha became greatly excited when I said this; she told me that "I must try and think,—I must help her to find him out."

"Bertha has fallen in love with his picture," said Joachim, teasingly.

"Nonsense! I only think it would be charming to have an old uncle, and to be his pet."

"And do you flatter yourself that *you* would be so?" said Joachim, consequentially.

"*You* wouldn't, at all events. Young men never want uncles for anything except to pay their debts; so I would stand a fair chance. Old men always like young girls. Elsie's grandfather's whole face brightens the moment she appears; and I want to have some one whose face will brighten when *I* come in."

I smiled.

"I know what you want to say," she continued, turning to me rather sharply. "You are going to tell me that it lies in every one's power to make people glad to see them. But the way in which you mean it, I should have to strive to gain it by my own efforts; and I want it to come of its own accord."

No, she was wrong; I was not thinking of that. I was pleased, on the contrary, at the natural wish,—the young heart still longing for the purest joy of life, in spite of worldly bringing-up and injudicious influences. A face that brightens at sight of her! A worthy ambition. May she choose the right path to obtain it!

"My dear child," said Frau von Löben, "every passably good-looking girl has that, sooner or later. Only wait till next winter."

Bertha shook her head. "No, I don't mean that, either; I want something better still." She paused for a minute, lost in thought, and then exclaimed, passionately, "And I would be his favorite, I know!"

So saying, she took her picture and ran from the room, amidst the laughter of her brothers. Frau von Löben begged me to try and remember where I had seen the original of the portrait. Now that I no longer had the picture before me, I felt sure that what made it seem familiar was only the strong likeness it bore to Bertha. Every one was much disappointed at this commonplace explanation, and I was compelled to blight Frau von Löben's hope that through my instrumentality the "rich uncle" might come to light at last. I don't like those words, "rich aunt," "rich uncle," which flow so glibly from the children's lips, without, I hope, a full appreciation of their meaning. It is one of the trifles which show the general spirit of the times,—a spirit of loveless, selfish calculation. Often the words are used in thoughtless jest, but, ere one knows it, they cling fast to the memory, and as the ear grows accustomed to the sound, so does the heart to the meaning. Those words with the children are the principal pillars of their future. On these they have been taught to depend, instead of having axe and chisel given into their hands to build their fortunes for themselves. That they will have to do, nevertheless, for that the richest as well as the poorest must do! But how much easier for those who have been early taught to depend on their own efforts! To prepare them for

these efforts is the duty of parents; for the rest, the world is wide, and there is room and material enough. May Heaven aid these children in their building! for their parents cannot or will not help them.

EIGHTH LETTER.

You certainly are well acquainted with human nature, my dear Count, for in no other way can I account for the kind letter I have just received. Yes, you have discovered that, in spite of the unrestrained way in which I have written to you, and in spite of our old acquaintance, it is a lonely sort of thing to write to any one without a consciousness of how or when our letters are received, or of what effect they produce, and without obtaining any impressions in return for those we give. It is like telling a story to a silent and invisible auditor. For a long time we go boldly on, but at last we think, "To whom am I speaking? Is he listening? Do my words strike discordant notes, or has he gone to sleep in the midst of the story?" It is strange that we rarely find pleasure in one-sided action,—our natures require something that reacts upon them. The instrument that we touch must yield a sound; sparks must fly out from the flint; the clasp of the hand requires an answering clasp; the eye seeks an understanding glance from the eyes of others; the voice that we send into the distance awaits an echo. Only death is dumb. Love and friendship, and faith in both, reach beyond the grave; and in the fact that no answer can return to them from that unknown eternity, lies the whole bitterness of bereavement. A

thousand thanks, then, for your letter. The half-hour during which you spoke to me answers the months in which I have been the speaker. You are interested in my new friends; you wish to hear more about them; so I go on telling you of them with renewed courage.

My friendship with the family is steadily increasing, perhaps least of all with the member with whom an intimacy would seem most natural, although she overpowers me with the kindest proofs of her good will. The loveliest flowers bloom on my window, and I have to be careful how I express a wish in her presence, for it is at once fulfilled; and had I not decidedly declared that I must have at least my forenoons to myself, there would have been an end of all my fine dreams of having my time at my own disposal, and of employing it in systematic, agreeable occupation. She came at all hours, early and late,—sometimes, she declared, “only for a minute; that she could not possibly stay away longer;” but the moment was spun out to hours, and a passing question to an endless amount of gossip.

Not that she wearied me; no, indeed. She is a piquante woman, if only from the strange and contrary mixture of which her character, or want of character, is composed. Her feelings are as fresh as those of a young girl, her actions as unreasoning as a child's! You can love her or scold her, but the mutual understanding that is the foundation of true friendship is wanting. She seems to me like a whirlwind, which draws everything along in its wild train;

but I cannot understand wherefore, nor do I feel the slightest desire to join in the mad dance. When Frau von Löben, with her inopportune benevolence, faulty judgment, and excess of sentiment, raises these clouds of nonsense, I at first laugh, and then pity her,—still more her children,—most of all her husband. I do not believe that the latter is really happy, though he appears to be so. It requires a stronger nature than his to resist the influence of the whirlwind. He—poor fool—joins in the dance, and is almost suffocated with dust and rubbish; and Death stands behind him, ready to claim his victim, which Frau von Löben decks and draws into the excitement of society, as though he would thereby be cheated of his prey. One would think her heartless, did she not prove the contrary; and her conduct to her stepchildren does her great credit. Whether she in her heart makes any difference I do not know. She certainly shows no preference to her own, but is equally lenient to them all, especially to Dietrich. He is kindness itself towards the mother,—considerate, attentive, and scrupulously shields her faults. He has considerable influence over her; and as he, in common with many other people, keeps his sound judgment and sensible opinions rather for export than for private consumption, I have often noticed how he restrains and checks her in many of her extravagancies, without her being conscious of it.

Dietrich and I have grown great friends. At first, when he came to see his family and found them out, he very naturally came to my apartments to wait for

them, would remain sometimes to tea, and gradually began to repeat the visits when he had nothing better to do. An hour is soon chatted away, and is only long to those lonely ones who distinguish between occupation and enjoyment and do not recognize the fact that they are dependent on each other. But would you believe that Frau von Löben actually undertakes to rally me about Dietrich's visits, and gives glowing accounts of his esteem for me? What a singular mania for distorting the most natural things in the world! I am glad the young man finds pleasure in my society. When young people seek after and enjoy intercourse with those older than themselves, it is usually a sign of a thoughtful nature, a mind eager for knowledge, and seeking an equivalent for the thousand frivolities and *faderies* which beset their path. They gain experience; we, freshness of feeling; so the bargain is a fair one. But Frau von Löben is not to be checked even by a reference to my age, for she takes everything so literally. Why, being old does not mean that we have outlived all enjoyment, all interest in life. I do not mean merely gray hair, by age. I mean the change from the pleasures of youth and the taste to enjoy them to those of riper years. I cannot laugh and cry in the same breath; I cannot blow soap-bubbles, or build castles in the air with belief in their solidity; but I can look at others doing these things, and enjoy it, too. It interests and refreshes me; and I can understand the eagerness with which young natures long to solve for themselves the enigmas of life, and the anxiety with which

they look forward to the time to try their own pinions. Nothing is unimportant that is a part of human nature; even folly becomes interesting. I think the young officer understands all this, and therefore bestows upon me from time to time an idle evening, not from politeness, to which I ascribe it as little as to the wonderful "esteem" which his step-mother declares him to entertain for me. But why should all emotions of the soul have a reason? Is there no such thing as intuitive action?

It is not difficult, however, to discover a reason for Joachim's visits; it is a very practical one. He comes for his supper; and, so far from being offended about it, it pleases me extremely. I don't blame the poor boy for not enjoying the unpalatable tea prepared for him by the servant. Generally speaking, he eats nothing; but, when he is hungry, he comes straight to me; and I really believe that he is pining; for he comes but seldom. He is not exactly himself, and his humor is most variable; from the greatest hilarity he descends to the deepest depression. I think he has a nature which, to be really happy, requires regular occupation and blameless conduct.

Not long ago Bertha paid me a visit: however, she did not come of her own accord; Dietrich brought her.

"May I come in?" he said. "I came to see my parents, but they have gone to the house of one of my father's employees, who expends about two-thirds of his small salary for the pleasure of boasting of the President's presence at his entertainments. Everything in this world is vain."

"And the lieutenant of the Guards the most so of all," I interrupted.

He laughed.

"Do you mean that he is vain, or that he belongs to those things which are vain because they are useless?"

"A little of both," I replied.

During this skirmish, Bertha was standing in the background, looking rather embarrassed.

"I found her," said Dietrich, pointing to his sister, 'all alone, half asleep with ennui and discontent, and made her come with me.'

The young girl looked at him with reproachful dismay.

"Yes," he repeated, "I made her come, for she was afraid to do so of her own accord."

"I did not know whether to come or not," she said, hesitatingly.

"She is so jealous and distrustful,—you would not believe how much so,—and where she cannot be first she always feels herself slighted," said her brother, throwing himself comfortably into my particular arm-chair, from which I instantly dislodged him, giving him a seat elsewhere.

"That is not true," exclaimed Bertha, excitedly,—then added, in some confusion, "I don't know how to flatter people, and I don't like to go where I'm not invited."

I rose, got a card, and, writing on it, "Fräulein Bertha von Löben is, once for all, invited for every unengaged evening by Hildegard von Schönerbrunn,"

handed it to her with a low courtesy. She read it, and a smile and a blush passed like sunshine over her pretty face; then it darkened again, and she said, half-defiantly, "I won't come often. I'm no universal favorite—like Gertrude," she added, in a low voice.

"Whether you be so or not, there is one thing a universal favorite always should be," I said, in a gentle voice intended to soften the reproof.

"What do you mean? What should a universal favorite always be?" she asked.

"Trustful," I replied.

She shook her head slightly, and joined with less embarrassment in the subsequent conversation. She had no work, her hands rested in her lap or drummed idly on the table; Gertrude was sewing diligently; Arthur and Clärchen were building card houses; Dietrich had a sheet of paper before him, on which he was drawing caricatures; I was knitting.

"Won't you get your work, too?" I asked. "It seems so unsociable for you to be doing nothing; it looks as though you were going away directly."

She rose and left the room, but did not return. As I could not understand what the reason could be, and supposed that something had occurred to detain her, I sent Caroline after her. She returned with the message that the Fräulein was playing the piano! I laughed; Dietrich sprang to his feet, and was about to hurry in search of her, but I would not permit him to do so, and restrained him from expressing his feelings by pointing silently to the children. He

said nothing until my little guests had left me at nine o'clock, their usual bedtime.

"The contrary child!" he exclaimed. "She resents the slightest reproof, and rejects advice, as though she needed no guidance; and she does need it so sorely! I beg you not to be repulsed by her," he continued. "Take an interest in her, and do not cease from counsel and reproof because they meet with so ungracious a reception."

"Why should I?" I replied. "What is your sister or her peevishness to me? She has her parents."

"Her father is closely occupied, and in ill health; her mother——" he hesitated. "Her mother is inconsistent. So Bertha's rudeness passes unreprieved. It would be a good work, and one that I think would bring its own reward."

"Yes; judging from my recent experience, I should think I might expect most brilliant results. Again, why should I undertake it? I want to have a calm, peaceful life, free from violent emotions, which I do not like; I am perfectly happy at being released from all care, all responsibility, and why should I voluntarily assume them? Should I place stones in my own path, only to bruise myself against them? The guidance of the young I regard in any case as a difficult work, a task requiring the most extreme self-sacrifice, the most unselfish love, and one in which we must anticipate, and hope for, no thanks. Besides, the thanks are of little consequence; for, if we succeed, they lie in the work accomplished,—if we fail, they are, of course, valueless. Duty must be the

motive power: duty does not call me in this case, and I cannot undertake it."

"And yet my little brother and sister are with you every evening, and the good results of this intercourse are most evident. They cannot have improved so much of their own accord. Are not the little rogues 'stones in your path'?"

"No,—flowers rather," I replied, heartily.

"Well, then, do take pity on the big, neglected plants also," he said, laughing.

"Are you one of them?" I answered.

"Perhaps. At any rate, I am conscious of many better thoughts and feelings since our acquaintance."

"For example?" I asked; but his only reply was that they were more easily felt than expressed.

Another thing which the young man told me astonished me extremely. It seems almost as though these people were struck with blindness. Each one does what seems to him pleasantest at the time; the humor of the moment rules them, rather than the voice of reason. The idea of conquering evil traits, or, indeed, of taking any trouble upon themselves, never seems to enter their heads. Light must be the burden life lays upon them, easy must be the labor, great and unbounded the enjoyment; unrestrained freedom, result without preceding effort,—this is what each one desires and looks for, and unless the pigeons fly into their mouths already roasted, they consider it a very hard case indeed. The future is hidden from our gaze; why think of it in the enjoyment of the present? And as for the past, it is over and

gone,—best forget all about it. Such are their axioms. Listen, and judge for yourself. There was a certain sum of money set aside by a distant relation of the Löbens (who, dying without descendants, left his fortune in charity) for the benefit of the poorer members of the family. His object was to prepare them for any calling for which they seemed to have talent; and, as the founder himself was fond of agriculture, especial advantages are offered to those who select this branch of industry. He who desires to study this, not only is given means to attend an agricultural academy and also to receive practical instruction, but, on attaining a certain age, a sum of money is placed at his disposal, to be used either as security in renting a farm, or, if he prefer to purchase, as the first instalment of payment for the same, and in that case is gradually to be repaid to the fund. But he who selects either a diplomatic or a military career receives only three hundred thalers a year, which ceases as soon as his income has reached the sum of a thousand thalers. The intention of the testator was to supply assistance to the poorer members of his family, but not to secure them a means of subsistence without effort on their own part. Therefore he only provides moderate aid, and in some cases merely a loan; the overplus is to be added to the capital; and this is not to be used for the benefit of separate individuals, but for the general interest of the largest number. Only a short time has elapsed since the death of the testator, and, consequently, the funds have not increased sufficiently to admit of aiding

more than one person at a time. The first to profit by this arrangement was the President's elder brother, who, as he devoted himself to agriculture, enjoyed the fullest assistance, and, by means of this and of his wife's fortune, succeeded in purchasing "Löbenau," an estate which formerly belonged to the family, and the one which I mentioned as now being the property of the "rich aunt." Dietrich, who has the next claim to assistance, was educated to the same occupation as his uncle, and showed talent and fondness for it, only desiring to complete the time of his military service ere finishing his agricultural studies in a practical establishment. He entered a cavalry regiment, and, becoming fascinated by the romance of soldier life, the desire to remain in the service took strong possession of him. His father was much opposed to this change; he said that it would blight his son's chances for a safe and prosperous future, giving him instead a career demanding great firmness of character, requiring heavy expenditure of money to keep up a creditable appearance, and rewarding many sacrifices only by empty honor. The father's advice and Aunt Schöнау's prophecies were all of no avail. The mother, fascinated probably by the becoming uniform, pleaded hard for the young soldier, and the resistance of the weak husband was soon overcome.

"What an unreasonable man you are!" I exclaimed, when Dietrich had finished his recital. "If your father really is, as you say, destitute of all means save his salary, you certainly have acted in a most unjustifiable manner."

"Well, I have the three hundred thalers, anyhow ; that is something," was his reply.

I told him he had far better resign his claims to them in Joachim's behalf.

"Joachim ! that bright fellow ! No, indeed ! Joachim wants to study first, and then be a diplomatist."

"As though one could not use his wits as well in the country as anywhere else, and as though scientific agriculture were not far more successful than ignorant agriculture."

"Well, if it becomes necessary, I can still change my mind," he said, laughing at my eagerness. "I would have to be very industrious, though, for the examining committee is extremely strict."

"All the better ; the testator did not design to establish a sinecure for idle people."

"You are very severe," he said, smiling. "You will be very strict with your sons."

"My sons !" I looked so dumfounded at the mere idea that he laughed merrily.

"I beg your pardon," he said ; "I thought you were one of those people with whom it is not necessary to measure every word ; but perhaps you think it not *comme-il-faut* to speak of children to a single lady ?"

"Oh, no," I said, laughing in my turn ; "but I do think it rather superfluous to anticipate the bringing-up of people who will never exist. I have no intention of marrying."

"Do you hate men, or only despise them ?" he asked.

I hardly knew what reply to make, for I could not tell whether to think the man blind, or merely hypocritical enough to be trying to flatter me. Does he think all women so "crazy to be married," or the "holy estate of matrimony" so blissful a condition, that every one of us is willing and eager to assume the dignity of matronhood?

He was looking at me thoughtfully.

"You look like an English copper-plate engraving," he said, suddenly. "I beg your pardon," he added, quickly. "I know you are different from most women, and do not take every flattering speech for gospel truth; but you must not reverse the principle and take truth for flattery. May I tell you plainly the impression you make on me?"

"Certainly, if it affords you any amusement," I answered.

"You really are a most extraordinary young lady."

I did not think it worth while to quarrel over the adjective, and so did not interrupt him.

"You must have been educated in a totally different school from our family. We children need bitterly some strong discipline. There is much good in us all, but we lack something to make that good available. One of us thinks that something too much trouble,—the other doesn't even perceive the necessity. I mean myself and Bertha. Gertrude has found it instinctively, and the children are too young yet to judge of. As for Joachim," he shrugged his shoulders, "I am sure he must spend more than his five thalers of pocket-money; but I can't be too

severe with him, lest I lose his confidence. Besides, five thalers is very little."

"Five thalers is not very little for a school-boy," I said.

"Estimations of money are very different," he informed me. "Not long ago a young lady asked me if it were true that there really were lieutenants who had debts to the amount of a hundred thalers. 'I only wish I were one of them!' I thought to myself. Simple child! What are a hundred thalers nowadays!"

"When I came here, I supposed your father to be wealthy," I said.

"Unfortunately, he is not," he answered; "but he has a handsome salary. Indeed, if he should die—and he is so very delicate," and the young officer's voice grew sad and low, as though he disliked even to speak the words, "I do not know what would become of the children. I am the only one whose education is finished, and even I do not stand on my own feet yet. Ah, well!" and he made an impatient gesture, "what is the use of worrying over it? The fault lies in the times."

A singular idea! What makes the times? All complain of the despotic power, and all labor busily to forge the chain that binds them; and when the chain is not of gold, how they struggle to gild it!

My young friend had dismissed his sombre reflections, and was resuming his usual light-hearted strain, when I sent him off, as I wanted to begin my letter to you, and it was growing late. From the room above rang Joachim's voice in a merry song. He

often sings until late in the night, and I have begged Dietrich not to prevent him. I love to hear such expressions of happiness springing from a frank, innocent heart. And it does not disturb me, either; for if I am really tired it never keeps me awake.

"May I come again?" said Dietrich, as he rose to go. "I have passed such a pleasant evening, and I don't blame you in the least for frankly saying what you disapprove of in us. If you were in my place, you would have turned farmer; now, wouldn't you?"

I told him I decidedly thought he should still do so. The idea seemed to startle him considerably.

"Now, when everything points to an imminent war!" he exclaimed. "Now, when at last the opportunity seems at hand in which I can do honor to myself and to my profession! Resign *now*! How can you advise such a thing?"

"My dear friend, there is time enough to talk about war. How often already has the voice of the bugle sounded only to die away in harmless echoes? You have plenty of time to study, and, if war should break out meantime, what will prevent your joining the forces?"

"No, no; I cannot resign!" he exclaimed. "I am a soldier, heart and soul! I love my regiment; I cannot leave my comrades. You do not know the strength of the tie that binds us. One for all, all for one. Our lives the king's,—the present moment our own! To-day rich, to-morrow poor,—hearts as light as our knapsacks. The greater the deficit in our purse, the more we trust to Fortune. Fortune is

our goddess. To-day she helps one, to-morrow another."

"And if some day she fail you altogether? Think of your parents, your penniless brothers and sisters!"

"Then I shall marry!" he said, lightly.

"For money?" I asked, much disgusted.

"Oh, well, I wouldn't take the very first one I met," he said, apologetically. "I would marry some one I liked well enough; but a poor man can't afford to marry for love. But I'm not obliged to resort to that yet awhile. Though the waves rise high around me, I can steer pretty well, or swim, if it come to that; at all events, I trust to Fortune! Who should trust to her, if not the young,—if not a soldier?"

He left me in a very thoughtful humor.

"And let the beaker be of gold!"

rang Joachim's voice through the quiet house.

"And a sleeping-draught in it," muttered Caroline, angrily, to herself. She was just repeating, for the third time, her favorite manœuvre of passing through my room, on some pretense or other, which she always resorts to when she considers that I have been absorbed too late in reading, writing, or thought. I understood the hint, and went to bed, as an obedient servant of my servant, while the singer above me shouted so often, "The lady whom I love, I do not name!" that the song haunted all my dreams, and, between sleepiness and recollection of my sex, became transformed into, "The youth whom I name, I do not love!" And I hope that will continue to be the case.

NINTH LETTER.

Two important alterations in my monotonous life. I have commenced taking my meals with the Löbens, and I have, at Frau von Löben's invitation, joined a sewing-circle to which she belongs. The prospect of my joining them at table was hailed with such delight by the little ones, and so cordially urged by the older members, that I gladly consented to draw closer the bond that united me to the family. Now my meal-hours, formerly the most lonely of the whole day, are sources of real pleasure to me, and I enjoy them heartily, in spite of the frequent bad cooking. The children say precisely what comes into their heads, which certainly has the advantage of bringing to light all the nonsense that finds a lodging in their little brains, and renders it liable to correction; although reproof is bestowed less by the parents upon the children, than by the children upon one another. These mutual corrections are not always administered in the gentlest way imaginable. Each one lectures the others, and, with the exception of Bertha, on whose moods it is impossible to count, there is generally much humor displayed in the reception of these reciprocal reproofs. Gertrude, however, never blames, and is never blamed.

"She's too good for this world; she'll die young," says Joachim, teasingly.

"She's stupid and tiresome," says Bertha. "Mamma calls her 'my family pack-horse,' because she allows everything to be put upon her that is too heavy for the others to carry."

I congratulate the family that possesses such a "pack-horse," such a docile, patient, gentle, cheerful creature, who sees no degradation in loving, voluntary servitude. In spite of the numerous jests at her expense, and their rather contemptuous way of speaking of her, they all love her very dearly, and Bertha by no means the least of all. *Apropos de* Bertha, I must tell you that not long since she came voluntarily to pay me a visit, and actually brought her work with her. She asked, somewhat confusedly, if she might stay. Of course I consented, and made no reference to her recent rather ill-tempered desertion. You know I have no desire to undertake the thankless office of a reformer of manners. Bertha will probably be restive for some time longer, but I think she will in the end lose her foolish sensitiveness.

The Carnival is over, the "cream of society" is resting for awhile, and so it happens that Dietrich, one of that happy multitude, passes many free evenings with me, which certainly proves that he is easily pleased. Now that the court-circle has sunk into Lenten repose, the smaller people begin to lift their heads, and, as Frau von Löben says, there is no hope of respite until Easter week. Bertha declares positively that next year this must be changed; she will not go to the house of every one and any one; her parents must have themselves and her presented at

court. Her mother is perfectly willing, her father is not. There was quite a scene on the subject the other day; but all the President's representations that he could not consent to an expense so far beyond his means, were of no avail. Frau von Löben endeavors to convince herself, and her husband also, that it is a duty which he owes to his position, as well as to his daughter. She romanced about the brilliant results that might follow, and built air-castles up to the very clouds. Herr von Löben still shook his head disapprovingly. But Bertha put both arms around his neck, and coaxed and caressed so effectively that at last, with a resigned smile, he said, "Well, well, children, if it gives you so much pleasure, let it be so."

Frau von Löben rewarded the yielding nature of her husband by the expression of her hearty conviction that he was the very best man in the whole world; and I could not but think how weak was the "goodness" that knew no other way of giving pleasure than by granting every foolish, unreasonable wish. I thought on what this pleasure was founded,—the vainest, most frivolous, most childish things. "Happiness and glass are easily broken," says the proverb. Such happiness certainly is.

I think Herr von Löben must have read my thoughts in my face. "It is a long time to next winter," he said, as if to himself, but he glanced at me, as though explaining his having yielded so readily.

I think he is perfectly aware of his condition, and so a few promises more or less are of little

consequence to him. Who will call him to account for his failure to keep them? No one,—here or hereafter. But he *will* be called to account for giving his children no other inheritance than castles in the air, and for being satisfied at seeing them happy in their possession. It is perfectly evident from his words and manner that he sees and disapproves of the faults and follies of his family, but he has not the strength of character to breast the waves. There are many like him. Each one thinks, “What can *one* do against so many?” And so it comes to pass that these numerous “ones” do not bind themselves together in a strong breastwork to check the inroads of folly. There are so many associations for charitable objects,—why are there none for the bridling of luxury, of extravagant pleasures, of exaggerated fashion, that strives to transform a reasonable mortal into a motley peacock? Why are there no associations to check the madness that would give the rights and duties of the man to the woman? Why are there none against dishonest, inefficient servants,—against the evil literature that corrupts the taste either by its watery insipidity or by its false, wicked distortions of right and virtue?

The last thought leads me to some reflections on this class of literature. Splendid flowers bloom on the classic ground of poesy, lovely blossoms deck the island in the sea of life whither the Muse flies from the storms of the world, but access to it is open, and the island is overrun by every description of visitor. There are exceptions, of course,—some bril-

liant exceptions,—but of the thousands crowding around the fountain that conceals in its depths the wisdom and treasures of all time, the generality draw up only water, and many—alas! too many—disgusting monstrosities. One very singular and almost universal characteristic of these books strikes me strongly. It is not only the effort to bring before the reader all the dark, all the fallen traits of human nature, but the prejudiced or malicious endeavor to ascribe these traits especially to the higher classes. When elegance of manner is used to cloak vileness of thought, when hypocritical word covers evil deed, they make a more repulsive impression than brutality or violence born of misery or want,—than crimes which the criminal was never taught to regard as such, or to which he had been driven by strong temptation. There may be truth in some of these characters, and we condemn all the more severely those who have fallen from the heights; but we must guard against judging the whole by single examples; and those who by word or pen work upon the feelings of the masses, should look well into their own hearts and examine whether there lurk not within them some prejudice or party feeling, those implacable foes to justice. Besides, there are truths by whose unveiling no one is benefited, for it does nothing towards the improvement of the people, or the battle against coarseness, to expose to the world's gaze these terrible examples of the distortion of which human nature is capable. We both belong to the “higher classes,” my dear Count; you have lived in and with the so-

called great world, and, besides, as owner of a large estate, have been thrown into constant intercourse with the country nobility. Consequently, you have had most admirable opportunities to become acquainted with the "aristocracy" in all their various degrees of culture. Pray tell me if you can trace the slightest likeness between their manners, mode of life, or language, and those ascribed to them in the type of book of which I have been speaking. I am sure that you will agree with me that the authors of such books either have never associated with the higher classes, or else are guilty of wilful misrepresentation, or, from narrow or unhappy experience, have judged the great mass with its endless varieties by a few of its worst specimens. Another singular axiom of such works seems to be that intelligence and rank are incompatible, and that the accident of birth excludes the higher endowments. I cannot assent to this. I do not look upon stupidity as a privilege accorded only to the nobility, but rather as an undeserved misfortune, from which there are sufferers in all classes.

You may imagine how surprised I was to find Gertrude, a few days since, completely absorbed in a novel of the style I have been describing.

"I know nothing about the book," said her mother, who, with Dietrich, was in the room, but neither of whom had taken the trouble to inquire into what the child was so eagerly devouring. "Give it to me, Dietrich."

The young man had taken it from his little sister, and was glancing over it.

"I know about it," he answered. "Don't read it, mother; such books don't suit you. It would make you still angrier than the one you were reading the other day, where all the characters of noble birth had disagreeable voices, either rough or squeaking. A most remarkable trait of natural history," he added, laughing, "which I think could be disproved to any unprejudiced ears. I forget the author's name."

Gertrude was listening, open-eyed.

"Why, there's a lieutenant in this book who doesn't talk, but snarls," she said, delighted at her discovery. "What can be the reason?"

"The writer's want of prejudice," I answered; but of course the child did not understand the sarcasm.

"The author must be a true democrat," said Frau von Löben.

"Pardon me," I answered; "neither a true democrat nor a true aristocrat would strive to serve his party by falsehood, calumny, and intentional perversion of facts. But those you will find here on every page."

"I don't know anything about it," she answered. "I have no time to read all the books that come into the house, and I don't like to deprive the children of their chief enjoyment. Don't you think if there really are bad things in them they would serve rather as a warning than as an example?"

"That I cannot tell; but there is a certain amount of pollution in familiarization with cynical images and opinions. What effect must it have on so young a child to see her rank, sex, and the morals and

manners of her parents and ancestors so unsparingly slandered?"

Now Frau von Löben grew curious. "I really must read that book," she said; "it must be interesting."

I could not help laughing a little indignantly. "This is a strange world," I said. "Party feeling and selfishness sow the seed of poisonous lies, curiosity waters the budding plants from a desire to know what will come of them, and want of reason garners the bitter harvest. And so these literary weeds grow apace, till they overtop the healthier plants, and the rising generation, unwarned of their venomous qualities, is bowed under the load piled upon them by the sinful thoughtlessness of their parents."

Frau von Löben took my attack as an entirely personal one. She is so thoroughly childish, good woman, and expresses herself and all her feelings in childish fashion. She retorted, therefore, in no very measured terms. I don't like these wars of words,—above all, with unreasonable people, who, in their passion, lose control of themselves, actually forgetting what they are arguing about. So I let her finish without interruption or reply.

Her indignation was quite forgotten, but she still looked at me rather distrustfully, when we went that evening to the sewing-circle together. It was my first visit; and she informed me that they sweetened their not very agreeable occupation by reading aloud.

"I think you will have no objection to the works selected," she added.

I said nothing, but had my own thoughts on the one read that evening; for it represented all goodness as consisting in the religionism—not religion—that seems to say, “Stand by; I am holier than thou,” and, denying the Christ-like virtue of humility, regards all others as wanderers, or, at best, as seekers, and itself as the only one who has found. Such ideas are little to my taste,—as little as hearing holy things profaned by being dragged into common conversation in connection and association with the merest bagatelles of life. These are, according to my opinion, two of the evils of the day. There, cynical images and phrases; here, holy texts sown broadcast over ordinary every-day matters: there, a drought of the purest wisdom; here, a freshet: on one side, the slime of coarseness; on the other, the quicksand of hypocrisy: here, bold invocation of every temptation; there, cowardly flight regarded as the highest courage. I believe that every struggle in the world is a struggle for the true equilibrium; the world has the advantage, more or less, but never entirely. Did each one but strive to settle this balance for himself, the conflict would soon be over; but who would be the victor?

But you must not judge our association from my condemnation of its choice of books to be read aloud. Its sole object is to aid poor working-people, by preparing clothes for their children, that they may have more opportunity to see after their own requirements, without being trammelled by cares for their little ones. We belong to no especial de-

nomination and bear no especial name. The book read is left to the choice of the reader. We meet once a week, in the house of our directress, an old lady who is much respected here. She was principal of one of the most celebrated institutes for young ladies in the city, and now, having retired into private life, devotes her time and powers to most praiseworthy objects. Her rather stiff dignity of manner and somewhat assuming tone show plainly the former school-mistress. She greeted me, the new member of the circle, with considerable relaxation from her somewhat pompous bearing.

"Sit down by me," said my old friend Frau von Schönaue.

"The young ladies have their place in the next room," observed the mistress, with a manner which admitted of no contradiction. But my old friend was not to be repulsed.

"Fräulein von Schönerbrunn," she said, "is eccentric enough to declare herself at thirty years of age no longer young. So you can place her beside me with a clear conscience."

"But you belong to the unmarried young ladies," said the lady, without noticing the objection, and with the air of a brigadier-general. Every one seems to insist on predicating of me the word "young;" but I'm obstinate on that point, and will not allow empty politeness to bestow upon me an appellation which I do not deserve. Still, I do not like to set myself up in opposition to the regulations of such societies, and expressed my willingness to go into the next room

if the rules demanded so strict a separation between the married and the unmarried members.

"It is only on account of the work," the directress answered, "as it renders the division more simple. The married ladies undertake all sorts of work, without distinction; for the young ladies I usually select myself, in deference to their delicacy of feeling. I have had much intercourse with young ladies, and know what is best for them, and how easily their sense of propriety is wounded or blunted; so I arrange that they have nothing to do with the boys' wardrobe,—at least, not with the—the——" She hesitated, seeking for a word.

"Trousers," said my old friend, coming to the rescue. "Trousers is the name of the article of dress."

I with difficulty restrained a smile, declared myself ready to undertake any style of work, and obeyed the repeated request of Frau von Schöнау that I would take a seat beside her.

During our whole walk home she was condemning the ridiculous prudery of the directress, unconvinced by Frau von Löben's efforts to justify it. "Child, that which is estimable I esteem, but that which is absurd will remain absurd in spite of all arguments; so talk no more about it."

Then, turning to me, she continued,—

"Did you look at the young ladies? Didn't they look as though they were dressed for a masquerade? Female costumes nowadays consist of a mixture of man's dress and woman's. Only look at the heads—the less in them, the more on them! It is perfectly

impossible for the amount of hair to grow on one head that you see piled upon it. I feel actually refreshed when I see a young girl's head adorned only with that 'crowning glory of woman,'—her own beautiful hair,—and that arranged as simply as possible. Simplicity is the source of all that is beautiful, honorable, and natural. Ornament ceases to be ornamental as soon as it begins to depart from simplicity."

In this strain she continued the whole way home, growing more and more emphatic in her condemnations, to my delight, and to Frau von Löben's despair.

Bertha is not a member of the society ; she doesn't like to sew, and her mother will not urge it upon her. She prefers occupations more "the fashion,"—theatrical representations, parties, raffles, or fairs, in which refined young ladies take the place of saleswomen.

"Only it looks very much like putting the pretty, vain young daughter herself out for sale," says Frau von Schönau. "Little trouble, plenty of amusement, and a charitable object,—an easy way of doing good, to be sure!"

"That you and Aunt Schönau should have been thrown together is really too bad!" complains Frau von Löben. "You are already so much inclined to take a one-sided view of things, and Aunt Schönau only encourages you in it. Every one who comes from the country to a great city must consent to resign old-fashioned notions; and Aunt Schönau makes it all the harder for you to do."

So I am to go to school for the second time, it

appears; but now, even as in my childish days, my mind receives a strong impression only from that which is within its comprehension. All else falls on the ear as empty sound, unless, indeed, as is often the case, we draw therefrom a totally different moral from that which it was intended to convey.

TENTH LETTER.

JOACHIM'S recent flame has just died out. I am thankful for it, for I hope he will be a little more amiable now. Before, he was, at times, positively insupportable, — sometimes languishing, sometimes ungovernable, always *distract*. Sentimentality and impertinence held alternate sway over his speech and manner. A few evenings ago, he came to pay me a visit, in a state of such quarrelsome excitement that I mixed a sedative powder and silently offered it to him. He was at first decidedly indignant, then laughed, thanked me, and declined it; but I insisted that the powder he must take. His mother, as usual, took his part.

"Love! love!" she said, apologetically.

"School-boy romance," I thought to myself.

Dietrich, too, who, as his behavior on the railroad proved, usually undertakes to keep his brother in order, makes excuses for this childish passion. "He is really deeply in love," he said to me, "and it is just as well that he should have the attack and get it over now, when anything serious is not to be thought of; for later he will have to consult his reason, and not his heart."

I shook my head disapprovingly.

"I think that you misunderstand me on this point," he continued, earnestly. "You seem to think that I

would throw myself away on the first girl who came in my path, for purely mercenary motives. That I never will do! I will never make a choice that will degrade me."

"I don't think anything," I answered, "except that people in such cases never act as they expect to act. The power of the heart is resistless. To what action it will call you, you cannot tell till the time comes. You are very young, and have missed nothing if you have not yet met your fate."

"I have often contemplated marriage," he answered, "and thought of many girls, all of them pretty, sensible, and, of course, rich; but, somehow, I never could make up my mind to come to the point. Something always seemed to hold me back."

"You talk as though marriage were a pure matter of business," I answered. "A man may examine horses, houses, or clothes that he thinks of purchasing, but he does not search for the woman he desires for his wife, nor compare her with other samples of the same article, and haggle about the price. No! she is found!—and then but one course lies before him."

"That is, if Fortune favor us," added Dietrich.

"Fortune can do no more than fulfil or deny our desires; but to a deed that our heart does not consent to, we should never permit ourselves to be forced."

"Certainly not," he replied.

And now to return to Joachim. He and Bertha were at a brilliant entertainment given, not long since, by the beautiful English lady. She was in search of

characteristic faces for a *tableau-vivant*, and, Joachim and Bertha having been recommended to her, she waived all etiquette and invited them both most urgently. You can imagine the excitement, both before and after the so-called "children's ball" which followed the tableau, at which were young officers and grown ladies,—the "cream" of society. Bertha's head is almost turned. She had a "perfect time." She has "had a glimpse of the glories of the world;" her eyes are yet dazzled and her heart longs for the motley, tinsel show. Splendor, wealth, rank,—those are the dreams of this young soul,—the three worshiped by the world, instead of the holier three, Faith, Hope, Charity. Unfortunately, the excitement is kept up by a devoted friendship that began that night between the young girl and a pretty, fashionable Polish Countess, the wife of quite a prominent man. She took a sudden fancy to Bertha, and was seized with the laudable desire to prepare her for society. "Countess Wanda" is now heard from morning to night, and Bertha is more with her than with her parents. The first-fruits of this intimacy are increased thirst for more luxury and extravagance, a desire to do everything that her new friend does, a bitter resentment against Fortune for denying her the necessary means, alternate passionate hopes that she may one day possess them, and lamentations over her hard lot. It is almost impossible to imagine the ladders that she and her mother build, leading first up to society and the court, and after that, Heaven knows whither! I beat a retreat as soon as Frau von

Löben places her foot on the first round of this ladder and begins to plan the style of toilet Bertha shall wear at these imaginary festivals.

“Ah!” sighed Bertha, during one of these conversations, “where will the money come from, though? Wanda will tell me how to dress,—we have already talked that over; but the money! Papa will never give it!”

“It will all come right,” the mother said, comfortingly. “The kind Father will care for you.”

The kind Father again! It is true that He clothes the lilies of the field, but I am inclined to doubt His clothing a vain, pretty young woman for court-balls.

Unfortunately, the Polish Countess is a very charming little creature, precisely calculated to turn the head of a young girl already strongly inclined to worldliness.

“That little Polish witch!” said Aunt Schöнау. “When she comes into the house, the last few remains of reason take to themselves wings!”

But even she has fallen under Wanda’s influence, and cannot be very severe with the fascinating little creature, although she takes the field against her most decidedly on all occasions.

“That droll, fat little person!” says the Countess. “She treats me precisely as though I were Satan himself.”

“Not Satan, but Satanella,” corrected my old friend.

“Why, what do I do so dreadful?”

“You exist!” answered Frau von Schöнау. “However, birds of Paradise have as good a right to exist

as useful fowls; but they are not fit associates for each other."

The little Countess laughs heartily at these speeches; indeed, she laughs at everything, but in such a silvery, sweet little voice that one laughs with her without knowing at what. She revenges herself for the name of Satanella by bestowing upon Frau von Schönau the title of "Satan's Grandmother."

The festival had a different effect upon Joachim. His delusion is over. The boy knew very few people, and consequently had by no means a pleasant time in the exclusive assembly. He found few to dance with and few to talk to; indeed, the beautiful object of his admiration, the fair hostess herself, who had merely invited Joachim and Bertha from a sort of caprice, was too completely surrounded by admiring worshipers to bestow any attention upon the half-grown youth. A piercing sensation of his own nothingness came over him, and that is usually the first flutter of the wings for a new and a loftier flight.

"Aunt Schönau, it is all chaff!" he said, in reply to her inquiries.

"What is that?" asked the "Excellenz," as I always call her now,—for she surely deserves the title.

Joachim did not know, himself. He laughed.

"Dietrich says it. I think it's some farming expression. I mean that it is all worthless,—all the splendor—all the world—is chaff."

"You are a fool!" replied the old lady. "See first that you yourself are worth something, and then you will be more competent to judge of people and of

things. All is not gold that glitters, it is true ; but the fact that gold does glitter does not render it worthless."

Some accidental remarks made by Bertha explained Joachim's misanthropy:

"My lady had such an exquisite bouquet in her hand,—not the one Joachim sent her; and she has the loveliest daughter, not quite grown yet, but compared to her her mother is——"

"Chaff!" exclaimed Joachim, rushing up-stairs to his room, singing,—

"I love alone the fair little one."

The rest was lost in the distance.

"A nice young fellow enough," remarked Caroline, afterwards. "But such mean-looking people come to see him,—such shabby people! they can't be fit company for him. Why don't you tell him so?"

"Not I, Caroline."

"Well," she chattered on, "he who touches pitch will be defiled; but when we see a child fall into a pitch-tank we don't think of ourselves,—only of him."

Her words startled me; but she could tell me no more.

"I am no busybody," she said. "I never listen when the servants talk of the family, so I don't know anything; but one thing I do know,—the people who go up to the young gentleman's room, and, when he is not at home, stand waiting for hours outside his door, are after no good. That much I am sure of. You ought to see to it."

"But, Caroline, he has his father and his mother."

“So have the little ones; and you know how much need they have of you.”

I went to bed that night full of anxiety. What could I do? It was not that I feared to touch the pitch; but suppose some one should say, “That is my pitch,—what concern is it of yours?” No, no; I will not interfere. Joachim has his nearest friend in his brother Dietrich; let him go to him for advice.

If he were *my* boy, I know what I should do. I should appeal to his own good heart.

The morning after the ball, Frau von Löben called to me, “Come here; I must show you the children. The morning after a ball is perfection; it is more beautiful than sunrise,—it is the truest poesy.”

I followed her, in some curiosity. Bertha was still in bed, neither weary nor exhausted, but enjoying the luxury of repose after yesterday's excitement. She was blooming as a rose; her long black hair hung over the side of the bed, almost touching the floor. Half raised, and her head supported on her hand, she was telling Gertrude and the two little ones of last evening's pleasures,—Scheherezade recounting her fairy-tales! Clärchen had come into her room very early, and had striven to open her sleeping sister's eyes, so eager was she to hear the wonderful stories. But they were not like the dear old fairy-tales; and the sparkling eyes of the teller were not full of the beneficence of the good fairies, but were bright with the first vain consciousness of the enchantment and power of her own beauty. It must be delightful, after all, to be young, beautiful, and admired. But

outward beauty should incite the possessor to keep the heart and mind worthy of its lovely shrine.

The breathless eagerness with which Gertrude was drinking in every word troubled me. Frau von Löben, also, took the brightness in the child's eyes for the dawn of like aspirations.

"When you are grown, you shall go to balls, too," she said, consolingly.

"Oh, no!" said the child. "I don't care to go; but—I should like to be able to see Bertha."

The lovely little creature! She and the two little ones are my guests now. The President some days ago received a letter announcing the speedy arrival of one of his oldest friends, and, being most anxious for him to stay at his house during his sojourn in the city, thought of giving up his own room to him, making use, instead, of the corridor which serves as a common passage-way. Frau von Löben was beside herself at the prospect, and yet knew of no other arrangement; so I came to the rescue. I proposed that Joachim should stay with Dietrich, and Frau von Löben and Bertha take possession of his room. Gertrude could sleep in Caroline's room, and the two little ones in mine. So the children's room would be left for the guest. A passionate embrace was my reward for the so-called sacrifice, which really was none at all. By the aid of the carpenter and upholsterer, Frau von Löben's excellent taste soon transformed the children's gloomy, ugly room into a most attractive apartment. Though the guest has gone, the old arrangements have not yet been re-

stored, as he is expected to return shortly, but only for a flying visit. So I will have the children for a little longer. I wish it were for much longer. They occupy still more of my time now; but it seems to me as though a moment spent with them were of more value than hours passed in no company save my own,—of more value, and pleasanter. Now, as I write to you, they are sleeping the soft, lovely sleep of their innocent age, and, in the stillness about me, I can hear their low, regular breathing, showing health of body and peace of soul. I look towards them every few moments, to refresh my eyes with the guileless picture. There they lie, their rosy cheeks pressed close together, their hands still folded from their evening prayer. I wish I had them always! I wish they were my own! But why? Is not all that the heart truly loves really a part of oneself? So every one can have something precious on earth,—even those who seem quite alone in the world. And a loss of that which we cherish is impossible, so long as we cling, with hearts full of love, to our right of possession. What death snatches away, what life threatens to take from us, still remains our own, so long as we do not resign the rights which our attachment gives. I pray God each day to give me something to love, which, so far as my poor powers go, I can care for and cherish, that my days may not pass uselessly away, and that, when the night comes, a bright star of gratitude and affection may light me to the other side.

ELEVENTH LETTER.

I HAVE not been in good spirits lately. I see inconsistency and confusion around me, and suspect that even worse things are hidden from my sight. I was not wise to cast myself on the torrent of life; there is no abiding peace, no lasting sunshine. But to what human beings are these vouchsafed, and to which of us would their long continuance prove a blessing?

There has been a great robbery at the Löbens'. The President's friend, of whom I told you, came to the city for the purpose of collecting some sums of money, and placed quite a large amount in the President's hands, to be taken charge of until his return. This, which was in a separate package, in Herr von Löben's desk, has been taken, as well as the month's salary which had just been paid, and quite a large quantity of silver-ware. The locks were not broken, but opened with pass-keys. The thief must have been perfectly familiar with them.

As I went to the Löbens' apartments, on receiving the news, I met Dietrich and Joachim, who were standing in the corridor, engaged in earnest conversation. I caught the words,—

“What! tell father now? Impossible! Cheer up, though! It will all come out right!”

On seeing me, they were silent, bowed, and went down-stairs together.

Over in the Löbens' apartments all was in confusion,—Frau von Löben in tears, the President pale and much disturbed. I think he was glad for me to come and take his wife away. Nothing could be done, save to give notice to the police, and that Dietrich had promised to attend to. I strongly suspect the convivial trio, especially Henrietta's *fiancé*, of complicity in the robbery, and said so plainly, but raised a regular tempest by so doing. Frau von Löben begged me not to mention my suspicions to her husband, and declared that she herself would answer for Henrietta's innocence (although she has had plenty of proofs of her dishonesty), and nothing would induce her to acknowledge that winking at small offenses paves the way for greater ones. It is not attachment to the servant, but only a sort of indolence, which makes her mistress unwilling to part with her,—dislike to quitting the path she has trodden so long, and repugnance to resuming the long-relinquished sceptre of household authority, even if she could “possibly find time” to wield it. As for Bertha, she scarcely even knows what the kitchen looks like. Her long trains would hardly do to wear there. It is easier to stay in the parlor, where they are suitable, than to change her dress or lift it up. Indeed, fashionable life seems concentrated in the parlor. My thoughts were wandering far from the robbery; Frau von Löben's were still busy with it, as was evident from her next remark.

“Everything is for the best,” she said. “I have

long wished for heavier and more modern silver. Now we *have* to get new, and I shall see that no one has handsomer."

I had been hearing so much lately about the impossibility of getting along on the President's income, that this new extravagance absolutely petrified me. But it was perfectly consistent with a not uncommon idea. Without silver, no company; without company, no enjoyment,—only every-day monotony. At home, bread and salt, if necessary, and the commonest ware; but for company, be outdone by no one! Rather borrowed silver than none! Why cannot people learn to detach themselves from things to which only Fashion gives value? Call it old-maid's notions, if you please, thirst for singularity, want of housewifely pride, egotism of solitary women,—it is my idea nevertheless! I did not think it worth while to say all this, but offered the silver which my aunt left me, for the present, partly because I really did not need it, and partly to spare the unhappy President, for a time at least, the system of persecution to which I knew he would otherwise at once be subjected. A passionate embrace was again my reward, and the "egotistical old maid" was suddenly transformed into "her good angel, her best friend, a model of self-sacrifice!"—a sudden metamorphosis, but not a lasting one, I fear.

The subject of despairing complaint was thus changed to Bertha's approaching confirmation. This solemn occasion has been the topic of conversation for a long time, not so much on account of its own im-

portance as of its being, as usual, the prelude to her introduction into society. Less thought is given to earnest preparation for the changeful experiences of woman's life, to strengthening the principles of Christian religion, to the deep import of this solemn transition-ceremony, than to the balls and gayeties which it is not customary for a young girl who has not yet received this sacred seal, to attend. This, however, has not been the case with Bertha,—at least, not since her intimacy with Countess Wanda. Hardly a day passes that the latter does not take her to some entertainment. Indeed, she is only awaiting her confirmation to beg her assistance in the performance of some French plays,—of course for a charitable object. Bertha is a little doubtful, but her mother has promised for her; but “of course not until after her confirmation.” I don't see why not just as well before as after; for holy and profane are mixed up in hopeless confusion in the young girl's head. Out of regard to Bertha's aristocratic friend, several alterations have been made in the arrangements for the ceremony. The silk dress has been chosen of somewhat heavier quality, and for the lace mantle which she was to have worn, a lace shawl has been substituted. A gold brooch, and ornaments for the hair, have also been purchased; but the President declared a watch a useless expense. The mother would gladly have offered hers, but it was “too old-fashioned;” and the “kind Father” was again expected to come to their assistance. I could not resist commenting upon this singular sort of faith, which, instead of

removing mountains, expected a shower of gold from heaven, making fertile the sterile fields of fashionable vanities and necessities. My words produced a long-ing exclamation :

“ A shower of gold! Only think! If we only could have such a shower for two or three days! Then I would have no more trouble; then life would be worth having! A shower of gold! how delightful!”

At this moment Bertha entered. We exchanged greetings, and she seated herself at the window, her hands lying in her lap, her eyes fixed on the street.

“ Everything is so dreadfully dear,” continued Frau von Löben; “ even the seamstress’s wages for making Bertha’s things amount to a large sum, and we stint ourselves in everything, and have all her things made at home; and if my poor husband has to replace that stolen money I don’t know what we shall do. There are so many rich people——”

(“ And so many more poor ones,” I thought.)

“ Why can’t we be rich?——”

“ Because we’re unlucky,” said Bertha, interrupting the jeremiade.

“ Yes, yes,” continued her mother, “ it is appointed so, no doubt. Aunt Ludovika will outlive us all. But I do think she might give Dietrich something, as she is keeping him out of the estate.”

I reminded her of the three hundred thalers a year that he received.

“ What is three hundred thalers to a gay young officer? Why, hardly enough to keep him in gloves. What remains to the poor fellow——”

"But to retrench," I thought she was going to say; but no——

"But to marry a rich girl? He must do it. It is his duty. I tell him so every day. He is the eldest. Unless Aunt Ludovika does something for him before long, he will have to do so. One of them must do something to keep the younger ones alive when their father and I are no more."

"I can't bear to hear you talk so, mother!" exclaimed Bertha. "Thinking about death is even worse than the ceaseless remembrance of our poverty. Both of you are far enough from death, especially you, who are so much younger than father."

"Younger, it is true, but much weaker," she replied, to my surprise. "I will certainly die first. I could not bear his loss; and, besides, I should go wild with jealousy if he met your mother in heaven and I were not with him. Yes, children," she continued, turning to us both, "you cannot imagine the love a wife feels for her husband. You, dear Hildegard, are uncommonly happy in being free from all family cares. You give your heart to your friends, and help them to bear their troubles; but still they are not your own relations. Certainly in that unmarried people are the happiest."

I made no reply, only breathed a fervent mental prayer that Heaven would deliver me from every egotistical, belittling, narrow affection, be it for whom it might. Upward should true love raise us; but it never can, if we hang the leaden weights of earthly, trifling sentiments on its glittering pinions. We

should not only strive to pass through life free from envy and selfishness, but we should strive to purify and raise even those better sentiments on which an undisciplined, inexperienced, frivolous, or unreasonable heart is apt to make shipwreck. I don't like to hear myself called happy, because fate has denied me the ordinary objects for these sentiments; but I still more dislike to have the capability denied to expend them on other objects, and thus to cultivate a tender, affectionate nature. Of course, I will never marry; but, if I did,—pardon the supposition, or laugh at me for it if you choose,—I believe that I would make an admirable wife, provided, of course, my husband was not of a particularly romantic disposition. Husbands, as well as wives, deserve their share of blame for the many unhappy or unloving marriages which so often come under our notice. The faults of the husbands I pass over in silence; they can find them out and correct them for themselves. Now for the wives' shortcomings.

“If I were a person of authority,” I said, suddenly, “I would allow no young girl to marry who had not previously passed a rigid examination before a committee of housekeepers.”

Frau von Löben looked up in perfect amazement. I explained to her the course of my thoughts. She laughed, and asked, rather scornfully,—

“Why not an examination into her moral qualities as well?”

“That could not very well be done,” I replied. “Moral qualities are the very foundation of love

He who has trusted his heart to a woman must be ready to accept the result for better or worse. Sympathy draws two hearts together. Whether their affection be strong enough to last through life, no tribunal save the Highest can decide. No human eye can penetrate into the future. But there stands the home, a tangible and visible object, and there the beauty of order can be displayed. Order causes comfort and respect. Little, well spent, goes further than much, wasted, and the anticipation of trifling wishes often prevents the forming of unattainable ones and the discontent sure to result. Orderly housekeeping brings an orderly spirit; and where blame finds no little outward neglects to expend itself upon, we avoid the danger that it will gradually grow to injustice and attack the innocent as well as the guilty. No, indeed! I insist upon the committee of housekeepers! Education would become a different matter then."

"Yes, we would return to the bondage of old times, which, thank Heaven, we have thrown off to give Nature a chance to develop unrestrained. I am doubly astonished at you, Fräulein Hildegard, whose whole life, until very lately, has been, as you yourself acknowledge, one long aspiration for freedom."

"You confound restraint and propriety," I answered. "Every creature, human or divine, every feeling, every action, is subject to some restraint; but the knowledge that it is reasonable, or necessary, makes that restraint proper, and makes us submit to it. One of Providence's loveliest arrangements is the separation of masses into families. But, to display the

full beauty of this arrangement, the wife must be priestess of the household gods; and that is rarely the case nowadays. No official is elected without some inquiry into his capabilities and fitness for the position. Is the wife's office a less important one? Are not her household duties in close relationship to the happiness not only of this life, but of the life to come?"

"You are very practical and sensible, but not at all poetical," said Frau von Löben; and Bertha, in great indignation, declared that if such a system as that were introduced, nothing would induce her to give any attention to household affairs, lest it might be supposed that she was anxious to be married. "And suppose I passed all my best days over such things," she continued, "and never married, after all?"

I could not help laughing at the unconscious contradiction.

"It is quite true," said the sensible mother. "Poor girls marry so seldom now, that it seems hardly worth while to sadden their youthful days."

I was silent. When the vessel is already sunk in the treacherous sands, it is useless to drop the plummet into the deep.

"You seemed to have pleasant thoughts just now, when you were sitting at the window," I said to Bertha.

"The few groschens it would save would not repay the trouble," she said, without answering my question.

"I think," said I, "that you do not quite understand the object."

"Possibly not," replied she; "but I cannot force myself to understand."

"It is as possible to conquer mental laziness as bodily; and pardon me if I say that I think it is a sort of mental indolence which prevents you from perceiving the falseness of your views and opinions. The judgment would not be wanting, and you could soon gain strength of mind to combat these fallacious ideas. And would you prefer to be a characterless creature, 'driven with the wind and tossed'?"

"Yes; if it be my nature."

"You say that to me; would you say it to those who, made keen-sighted by love, pointed out your faults?"

"A pretty sort of love it would be," she cried, excitedly, "that did not have the same feeling for my faults as for my good qualities. Those who do not love me, faults and all, need not trouble themselves to do it at all."

"We should always set an ideal before us, and strive to attain to it," I answered. "Only thus will we ever gain even that degree of perfection possible to our earthly natures. To be loved in spite of one's faults is, in the sense in which you say it, merely an obscure way of speaking,—nothing more. The better we love our friends, the more their faults pain us. They do not diminish our love, they only sadden it. My ambition would certainly spur me on to have little patience and tolerance with my faults, and to render as little difficult as possible the task of those who loved me in spite of them."

Bertha was angry; I saw it in the manner with which she accused little Gertrude of having misplaced her work-basket. The child tried to defend herself, but her sister's violence completely quelled her; at last she managed to explain that she *had* taken the basket, but only for the purpose of completing the work. But Bertha's ill humor was not so easily quieted.

"I didn't want your help," she said, angrily. "And if you are to work for me, and have me scolded for being idle, you shall not stick another stitch on anything of mine as long as you live."

And she quitted the room. Dietrich had come in a few moments previously, and had been listening to the conversation. His eyes followed his sister as she left, and he looked really troubled.

"What will become of her?" he said, sighing. "She has the qualities to make a heroine, or a *Me-gæra*."

It is true. Dietrich has plenty of sound sense and good feeling. Coming nearer, he said,—

"You could be a good angel to her. Again I beg you not to be deterred from the kind office by her ungraciousness. She really is better than she seems, but is totally undisciplined."

That is easy enough to say, but it is a hard task to undertake to supply the deficiencies of a faulty training, and I ask myself again, what concern is it of mine? It is strange, but each time I ask the question I find it more difficult to make a satisfactory reply. We almost involuntarily wipe off the spots

from an inanimate object; should we pass by in indifference the shadows on a human soul, and that soul one which has many admirable qualities and is not hardened in any of its faults? What now seems hard is as yet only the beginning of the process, but ere long love itself may try its influence in vain. It is full time to break the envelope of exaggerated self-esteem, obstinacy, and wilfulness in which she has wrapped herself. This refusal to acknowledge our faults, this insisting upon our own rights, is all the more difficult to root up the later we begin; and how unjust does it make us! Life offers many and various conflicts. It surely is easier to seek our opponents in others, rather than in ourselves; but how different the effect upon our characters! I have always pitied those people who find it absolutely necessary to have a scapegoat on which to wreak all their ill humor or impatience, and I have generally found them to be those who, from faulty judgment, self-conceit, or indolence, neglected to seek in themselves the cause of that ill humor and impatience. And yet this is most necessary; for, even if we fail to find the fault in ourselves, the passion has had time to cool, and the complaint, if complaint there must be, is apt to be rendered less regardless of the feelings of its object. How often do we disgrace ourselves by treating a friend like an enemy! Bertha's scapegoat is Gertrude, and if she goes on in her present path her truest friends will not escape scathless, and she will render her future lot either a continual combat or a neglected isolation, by misunder-

standing kind intentions, rewarding self-sacrifice with ingratitude, and smothering every gentle, tender feeling in unrestrained passion. I am sorry for her. She is but a child, and children seldom consider whither the path they are treading leads. I *will* take charge of her, for her mother would prove but a sorry guide.

I had at the dinner table to-day another extraordinary instance of Frau von Löben's inconsistency, besides the difficulty I found in reconciling her laughing, rosy cheerfulness with the dolorous complaints she had given vent to a few hours previously. The gayest plans, the brightest anticipations for the future, flowed from her lips,—expensive plans, of course,—visits to watering-places, balls and parties for the ensuing winter, pleasure-trips, etc. etc. I thought I must be going crazy, or my ears must be at fault. At last a famous singer was discussed, who is making a great sensation at this place. Bertha desired to hear her. Her mother promised that she should do so.

“The tickets are very expensive,” said Joachim.

“Joachim is turning miser,” said Bertha, sneeringly. “What is the matter with him? For three days he has worn his old coat, and yesterday I found him at work in his room without a cigar.” Joachim turned crimson, and he and Dietrich exchanged glances. Herr von Löben smiled approvingly on the boy, and said,—

“Are you growing sensible at last?”

“For pity's sake, don't turn prig,” said the mother.

Joachim attempted some laughing rejoinder, but it was stiff and forced, not natural and merry as usual.

"He is saving up for his future establishment. As soon as his examination is over, he is going to marry his last flame, whoever she may be; for he has kept very quiet about her," continued Bertha.

"Pshaw! my flames are all burnt out," said Joachim, with a forced laugh.

"So I supposed from the old coat; that's always a sure sign with you, till the next sensation brings the tailor into requisition again."

Joachim made a scornful gesture.

"I desire no return from my flames; I like to see a pretty face, whether it look kindly on me or not."

"Then, Joachim, what is the object of your dress-coat, and all your gorgeous waistcoats and neckties?" asked his father, jestingly.

"I owe them to my exalted frame of mind, papa," answered Joachim. "It is impossible for me to keep on an old coat when I am thinking of a beautiful face."

"What has all this to do with the concert?" asked his mother. "Are you too depressed to accompany Bertha?"

"No, mother; but the tickets are too dear, and I want to economize."

"What an absurd idea!" said the mother. "And you so fond of music! The few thalers will not be missed."

"I have heard the singer," said Joachim.

"Then you are only economical for other people?" said Bertha, sarcastically. "How kind of you!"

"I went in the gallery," replied Joachim; "and you couldn't do that, for you are a lady."

"Alas, yes! I wish I weren't!"

"Rather be thankful that you are," replied Joachim. "Men have a much harder time."

Bertha laughed.

"Foolish boy!" she said. "When you try to talk sense I cannot help laughing."

"How little it must take to amuse you, if even the 'sense' of a 'foolish boy' makes you laugh!" said he, good-humoredly.

"Ask Wanda; she will go with you," said Frau von Löben.

"No, indeed," said Bertha; "I can't do that, for she wouldn't let me pay for the ticket. It would be begging."

"She takes you often enough to the theatre," said Frau von Löben.

"Yes; but then the offer comes from her,—I don't ask her. I have to be careful with Wanda. She likes to give me things, and I have often offended her by refusing to accept the valuable presents she offers."

"Then I shall have to go with you," replied her mother. "You see," she continued, turning to her sons, "that your unwillingness to oblige makes your father pay for two tickets instead of one."

"Bertha, you are unreasonable; think of the robbery," whispered Dietrich to his sister; then he

continued,—“Is it absolutely necessary that Bertha should hear this singer? We must learn to deny ourselves sometimes.”

“A worthy pupil of Fräulein von Schönerbrunn,” said Bertha, with a mocking wave of her hand towards me.

“And a grateful one,” retorted Dietrich; whereupon Bertha’s indignation broke forth. “Was there any harm in desiring to vary the monotony of her weary life by a little pleasure? Were we born only for self-denial? It was niggardly, thus to measure every small expenditure and to count up the amount paid for every enjoyment. Were they in poor enough circumstances for a miserable robbery to ruin the whole family? If so, their mode of life was certainly an unsuitable one; if not, why should this eternal croaking break in upon every pleasure? Even the boys begin to preach!” she exclaimed, as she ended her passionate and unreasonable outburst.

Its result was an unexpected one. Herr von Löben rose. The hectic spot on his cheek was deeper than ever, and his eyes had a sad expression that went to my very heart.

“My children,” he said, “my life I give willingly for your happiness, but that is a passing thing, and, before Heaven, I declare that I have nothing else to give you! If your happiness depend on money, you are indeed most miserable! Seek it elsewhere, and seek it in peace!”

Every face was full of consternation, and Frau von Löben burst into tears.

“Husband, how cruel you are, to frighten us so! What is the matter now?”

“Nothing, nothing,” he said; “there are things that must be understood intuitively, or not at all.”

With these words he left the room, and Dietrich followed him. Frau von Löben wept hysterically; the little children stared open-eyed. I thought it best to withdraw and take them with me. The little things forgot the tragic scene quickly enough, and played about merrily while I began this letter. But suddenly discord arose. Arthur had built a block house, and Clärchen threw it down. She did so because it was finished, and she was in haste for him to begin another; and had she not, he would probably have asked her to do it; but, unfortunately, he was in a bad humor, and the poor little girl, who did not understand this despotic mood, was roundly scolded for her interference. She listened with humility, and finally he threw her a few of the worst building-blocks and told her to go and play alone. She retired to a corner, and sat quietly building, casting occasional timid glances at her brother, who strode up and down with the most revengeful aspect. I pretended to take no notice. The sad, resigned expression of the little thing, to whom the solitary play was a heavy penance, was just as lovely as the meekness with which she bowed to the unjust decree; and I was glad to see that she did not build impatiently or carelessly, but as neatly and exactly as ever. Her castle was finished, and she looked up to see if her sentence of banishment would not be repealed; but

the moment of revenge had come. The little boy ran towards her, and with one push the nicely-built house lay in ruins. Involuntarily I started from my seat, thinking the time to interfere had come. Not at all!

“Why, she’s laughing!” exclaimed Arthur, in overpowering astonishment. She actually was laughing! The little face had brightened at the approach of her brother. He came in anger; he came to destroy her careful work; but he *came* nevertheless, and, woman-like, she received him with smiles. Dear little thing! My eyes filled with tears. The child is safe from all the attacks of the world. Gentleness is her weapon,—the weapon of a true woman. Armed with that, she must conquer; and rough indeed must be the hand that would snatch it from her grasp. Gentleness is a gift of God. Let him who has received it give thanks on his knees for the boon, and let him who has it not struggle with all his power of will and strength of character to win it. Gentleness gives that equilibrium to the soul which in wild passion is sure to be lost. Self-command gains it by conquest, and the fruit of the victory is well worth the hard struggle it is apt to cost. I experienced to-day something of that struggle, and it did me good. Bertha came to me, and, half timidly, asked that I would cut out the skirt of her confirmation dress, as she intended to make it herself, that the seamstress might not be detained more than one day. I did not allow myself a single remark on the unusual resolution, or the dependence I placed on her perseverance in it. Bertha’s sensitive nature is easily

offended, and I know it must have cost her a good deal to come and ask my advice or aid. I, of course, complied, with the greatest willingness, and promised Caroline's assistance and my own. A warm, grateful look rewarded me. The young girl can look lovely; and to-day, especially, I could not but think that what the poet says is true of her,—“it is the soul which builds the body.” I fear she will have to seek amid ruins and rubbish for the materials for her building. Ruins and rubbish! that reminds me that another of the new houses, that are shooting up like mushrooms in every quarter, fell to-day. This is the third one of these buildings that has fallen ere its completion. So do they build houses nowadays—for the eye only: like the happiness of those who occupy them, they have no foundation, and cannot resist the slightest storm.

My lamp is burning low. Caroline put oil in it before she went to bed, but, I suppose, not sufficient to last long; for I remember the innocent expression with which she bade me good-night and told me not to sit up late. She looked so particularly guileless that I thought at the time something must be the matter. Now I understand what it was. She has her own way in pretty much everything, and compels me to go to bed much earlier than I otherwise would, by giving me such short measure of oil that I am compelled to lay aside my pen long ere I have grown weary of conversing with you. I have to obey to-night; but to-morrow I will show her that I have discovered her stratagem,—the good-hearted, dictatorial old creature!

TWELFTH LETTER.

You encourage me, my dear Count, to continue my letters, and to tell you of all my experiences. Yes, in such a quiet humdrum life as mine everything becomes an experience, striking some deep chord, awaking useful reflections, and helping to solve the puzzling enigmas of life. A spider's web in a sunny window or a dark corner, in whose meshes the unhappy flies expiate by a violent death their foolish disregard of danger, seems to me a fair type of the way in which we poor human creatures are entangled more or less by the follies and sins of this life. How many of these webs hang everywhere! New ones are being spun every hour, and the coarse fabrics of olden times were not half so dangerous as the enticing, silvery threads of modern weaving. I seem to myself like a great, buzzing fly, that, although conscious of the danger and not to be entrapped by it, still cannot resist the temptation to hover around and examine curiously the fatal snare. But, unlike the unhappy victims, I do it solely for my own profit and improvement. Frau von Löben lays all the blame of my "eccentric ideas," as she calls them, on my ignorance of the world, and says they come from having passed my life in an obscure corner, as it were.

Better a clean corner than a dusty palace, *I* think. I am determined to preserve my own individuality. I will not have my opinions and ideas broken to harness. I will cling to my own decisions as to what is becoming and what is not, and will not make propriety the mere slave of etiquette. I hear that it is not considered "proper" that I should live alone; and even my close intimacy with the Löben family does not shield me from malicious tongues, because—can you credit such folly?—there is a marriageable son in the family, with whom I have constant intercourse in spite of my professed distaste to society.

My aunt of blessed memory,—the one who dressed me in that remarkable manner for the masked ball of my childhood,—when I did not understand an order, and, childlike, stared at her, used to say, "Don't make such a baa-mouth, Hildegard!" But I never in all my childish days made such a "baa-mouth" as I did on hearing this extraordinary intelligence. So much so that Frau von Löben felt herself called upon to enter into an explanation.

"Don't worry yourself, my dear Hildegard. It is nothing, except they say you want to marry my Dietrich. People *will* talk; and, besides, it is not usually considered *comme il faut* for a young officer to visit an unmarried lady when she is alone."

I really didn't know whether to laugh or to be angry; but, as I am always more inclined to the former than to the latter, I laughed with all my heart,

"You are an egotistical sort of person," said old Frau von Schöнау, in her brusque way, "to make

such a great matter of your trifling deformity. Do you not know that such things are not of the slightest consequence nowadays, and that the distinguishing feature of our present high state of civilization and refinement is that young men of rank are willing to marry anything in the shape of a woman, if only she have plenty of money?"

"Not my Dietrich!" interrupted Frau von Löben, indignantly.

My old friend went on:

"Age, looks, religion,—nothing has the slightest influence when money is in one scale of the balance and want of it in the other. Jewess or Christian, old or young, wise or simple, it is all the same to them; and, bending before the universal power, they make haste to hide the one 'treasure' from the gaze of the world and to squander the other in 'riotous living.'"

"Shame!" again cried Frau von Löben; "*that* does not apply to my boys."

"Perhaps not to yours, perhaps not to some others; but it does apply to very, very many, and to all of them to this degree,—that they run after money."

"Dietrich would never marry a Jewess."

"There is no telling," replied Aunt Schöнау, with undisturbed composure.

"We are straying from the subject," said Fräulein Bricks, the former school-mistress (for this conversation took place at the sewing circle), with her usual pompous manner. "I believe we were discussing the laws of decorum, were we not?"

"Well, then we will be promenading around a pool

of stagnant water," said my old friend, with more truth than politeness.

Frau von Löben was provoked at the whole conversation, although she did not appear at all surprised that the thought of any connection between Dietrich and myself should not be regarded as an absurdity. She seems to consider the young man so irresistible that any woman to whom he holds out his little finger would rush to grasp his whole hand, and she will end by making him think the same.

It does not seem to occur to any one how delightful it must be to a lonely person like myself suddenly to become, as it were, a member of a large family, and how deeply I must enjoy this pleasure, so long denied to me. They all seem to me children alike, though the eldest son is an officer and the youngest has not yet doffed his frocks. When they visit me they come to a room open to every member of the family. It all seems to me so simple and so natural, and I could not help saying so.

"Nevertheless, you are a woman, and he a man," said Fräulein Bricks, as the champion of prudery; and I could not deny that fact, although really I failed to perceive its application.

"You ought to be able to understand my feelings," I said to her; "you have been so much with children."

"Only with female pupils," she said, pointedly.

"Well, it's all the same," I answered; "one can have a motherly feeling as well for boys as for girls."

"I have never allowed my fancy to carry me into a position which I do not expect to occupy," was the

answer, as the lady colored deeply, from injured delicacy and from indignation at being supposed guilty of ever having cherished a maternal feeling. "I loved my pupils as though they were my nieces; I give my relations the love due to them as such; but I should find it impossible to experience a maternal fondness for a handsome young officer; and you, Fräulein von Schönerbrunn, are much younger than I am."

I laughed. I don't suppose Dietrich *does* seem exactly like a son to me. To tell the truth, I have never thought much about what are my feelings towards him. But they are most innocent ones, I am sure,—so innocent that even the thought that his mother would probably repeat to him the whole conversation did not in the least annoy or embarrass me. It is only natural that I should be kept back from any dawning attachment by the feeling inculcated from my early childhood, and confirmed by riper thought and observation, that I was predestined to a solitary life. I have never been tempted to forget this; my heart always beats quietly and regularly, never have I been forced to repress any wild longing or regret; but I am willing, even without trial, to trust the powers of reason and experience. Woman's heart is a closed temple. Not to every worshiper are the mysterious portals unbarred; only to him whose earnest prayers are echoed from within. Mine will never be unclosed,—and so my longings for sympathy seek their vent in other ways. There is love in my heart; and, as it never can be bestowed upon any one being, it sends

forth its messengers into the world under different forms and appellations. No matter whither these messengers go, no matter whether they be called sympathy, friendship, duty, or tenderness, it is love which sends them forth on their pilgrimage; and though they may never reach the promised land (which, perhaps, after all, is fairer from a distance than in possession), yet they may gather and send home many precious treasures.

It is a queer world! On one side we see desperate struggles after liberty; on the other, the curb drawn with an unsparing hand: here, "Woman's Rights" (to many a woman's ear no longer a discordant sound); there, a holy horror of treading one step beyond the conventional boundary-line: here, woman's costume approaching more and more startlingly the masculine in cut and style; there, the most narrow-minded notions regarding the association of the two sexes. How will these strange contrasts be reconciled? Not forcibly, that is certain. When we learn to curb our extravagant ideas and requirements in dress and amusement, and return to the good old maxim, "work and pray," then, and only then, will the true emancipation of our sex begin. Give us the right to labor, open to us more sources of livelihood, employ women's powers so far as is consistent with feminine dignity and decorum, and how would the number of weary, worthless lives be diminished! It is woman's noblest calling, as wife, to call out the tenderer side of man's nature; as mother, to form and ennoble her children's characters; but

this should not cut her off from using her powers in other directions, if she can do so without neglecting her first and highest duties. Which is more contrary to true womanliness: to stand a young girl year after year in the market-place, as it were, until the faded flowers of youth can no longer be concealed by artificial bloom, and then leave her either to begin her life all over again, or to drag out a selfish, unemployed existence; or else, to endeavor, in her first strength and freshness, to turn her feet into some path of usefulness? That prudery which forbids young ladies to sew trousers, although they may wear hussar- or zouave-jackets, will, of course, cry shame at the suggestion of woman's work extending beyond the spinning-wheel. But the world progresses, and has long since left behind the ancient symbol of feminine labor; and it is as well that it has done so. I myself feel strongly the need of some occupation, and have sometimes been tempted to swell the ranks of "book-makers;" but the shudder with which I remember the difficulties, annoyances, and inconveniences to which female writers are subjected convinced me that I was not one of the elect, and I respect the art too sincerely ever to consent to force myself among its followers without a decided vocation. Read one page of Goethe or of Shakspeare, and then a whole thick volume of one of our modern poetasters, and you will find more ideas in the single page than in the whole volume. Of the many who think themselves called, few are chosen, and those few must force their pure music through the uproar of the

charlatan crowd. Book-writing and book-selling are a mere speculation nowadays, but whether taste or morals are benefited thereby is to be questioned. Even literature bends at the shrine of Mammon. God shield the world over which this tyrant seems to be gaining undisputed sway !

Well, I have told you what I cannot do ; the next question is, What *can* I do, to make myself useful and happy? But do not answer me; I must seek and find for myself; and, meantime, I will taste whatever healthy enjoyments life sets before me, wondering, as I do so, at the numerous indigestible dishes which have found a way into its cuisine.

THIRTEENTH LETTER.

I HAVE played the hostess for the first time in my new home, and have had a little tea-party, consisting of the Löbens, my friend Frau von Schönau, and, to give Bertha an unexpected pleasure, Countess Wanda, who was polite enough to send the most cordial acceptance to my note of invitation. I mounted half a dozen steps in Frau von Löben's good opinion, as soon as my invitation had been given, although she was almost inclined to consider its merits counterbalanced by my extraordinary contempt of form in sending an invitation to the Countess without having previously called upon her. But Countess Wanda's acceptance set me right once more in her eyes. I don't believe Frau von Löben could have been as much excited over her own first company as she was over mine. Her questions, suppositions, and advice were so droll that it was impossible to avoid laughing. I pretended to have invited a particular friend of mine, "although I was not quite certain whether he would come or not." I meant cheerfulness; she thought I meant you. My dear Count, in that case both would have come together.

Poor Frau von Löben passed an unhappy day in consequence of her curiosity. How she tried to outwit me! The children were sent to coax the secret

from me, but the little monkeys were so unskilful that their object was easily discovered. Even Caroline was tried; but she is a servant of the old school, and is not to be corrupted.

Bertha was perfectly delighted when she found Countess Wanda in my room. I never gave the girl credit for so much enthusiasm and affection as she displays for the pretty little Countess, who, although very little older than her friend, adopts an air of protection towards her. She pats her head, and strokes her cheeks, as though she were a child, as she laughs and jests with her. I do not believe a serious sentence ever passes the lips of the merry little sprite.

Frau von Löben's first words were to inquire for my mysterious guest.

"I haven't heard from him," I replied, shrugging my shoulders; "but one thing is certain, if he doesn't come, no one will have a good time."

"Don't trouble yourself," she answered; "I am in the best of humors, and my husband was really delighted to receive the invitation."

Herr von Löben overheard her, and nodded pleasantly to me. At first the curiosity was great; each time the door opened or the bell rang, every eye was turned towards the entrance; but gradually it was forgotten in the general gayety, and just when my strange guest was no longer expected he was there, shining in the pleasant faces and sounding in each cheerful voice. The children were as happy as possible, playing games with Gertrude. The little Pole fascinated every one with her sparkling vivacity.

Dietrich, Joachim, and the cadet, who is passing his Easter holidays with us,—even the President, and the old “*Excellenz*,” paid their court to her. She is, indeed, most charming.

You cannot imagine how quickly and how pleasantly the evening passed away. Caroline had baked some cakes after one of my mother’s receipts, and Frau von Löben at once asked me for it, as she is making a collection of receipts for Bertha’s use when she is married; so I procured the cook-book for her. It was my mother’s, and had not been launched into the world with the flag of gilt and bright colors under which every production of modern literature sails forth into immortality or forgetfulness, but hid its treasures of delicious dishes, and, to me, pleasant remembrances, under an unpretentious, dark binding. On every page was the sign of a quiet housewifely spirit; you may open many books nowadays without discovering this spirit, or, in fact, any spirit at all. My guests looked over the volume. Each one of my father’s favorite dishes was marked in red ink, and on the margin stood characteristic remarks in my mother’s hand. The old book seemed to bring back my childish days, and I began to tell of some droll incidents of the same, which enchanted the children, and recalled similar ones to their parents. Stories and laughter went on for a long time. Caroline, who, as you know, has opinions of her own and does not hesitate to express them, added much to the general amusement by her characteristic interpolations and com-

ments. We were like happy children, and forgot for the time all ceremonious forms, all distinctions of age and class. Such was the magic effect of my mother's cook-book. After this, who will call cookery a prosaic art?

If I were to attempt to tell in what manner we amused ourselves, I really could not do so. There are moments in our existence when we cast off whatever oppresses us, and throw ourselves freely into the pleasure of the hour. Wax candles and champagne are not necessary for these hours of enjoyment; indeed, they are rather incumbrances, for they presuppose such numberless formalities that the wings of happiness are clogged, and cannot rise. Pleasure that needs elaborate preparation is only half pleasure.

At last I seated myself at the piano, and began to play. All, except the President and Frau von Schönau, who involuntarily beat time, smiling at the gay scene, joined in the dance; and at last Wanda began to sing to the music as she danced. One after another joined in the song, and the fresh, youthful voices formed a lovely accompaniment. Frau von Löben danced with each of her children in succession, and at last Wanda insisted that she must take a turn with her. How lovely is a wife thus surrounded by her children, and how hard it is to understand why she should seek abroad those pleasures which await her in the warm hearts and bright eyes of home! At eleven o'clock I shut the piano, saying,—

“Early to bed, and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,”—

the maxim with which my father always used to check my childish objections to going to bed.

"Why, are you going to turn us out?" laughed Frau von Löben. "A fine hostess you are!"

I really had forgotten that I *was* the hostess and consequently was compelled by politeness to sit up until three o'clock, if necessary, and then to declare that my eyes were closing from enjoyment, not from weariness. I begged pardon, and assured them that I was not tired, but was thinking of the children.

"Oh, we're all at home," laughed Frau von Löben, and then added, heartily, "I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much! What fools people are, to allow themselves to be governed by outside things! But it can't be helped, I suppose."

Just as she was leaving the room, an idea suddenly struck her, and she turned back:—

"Why, your guest didn't come, and didn't even send any excuse. How very rude of him!"

"Oh, yes, he was here; and you yourself brought him. Thank you for having done so."

She was really almost angry when I gave the explanation.

"I thought it was something of the sort," said the little cadet. "I saw her mischievous look; and, besides, 'therein I recognize my Pappenheimers!'"

The boy has seen me twice, and pretends to know me so well!

"My child, it is easier to be wise after than before," said Aunt Schöнау, tapping him on the shoulder. But a cadet is not so easily rebuffed. My Max Piccolo-

mini shook off the heavy hand of the old lady, and answered,—

“But I knew it; for I saw in the Fräulein’s face that she was fooling us.”

“Attempt to fool a royal cadet!” I said, laughing. “Never would I be so presumptuous!”

“Oh, there is some disagreeable moral or some good advice hidden under the joke about the guest,” said Bertha, in a tone intended to be jesting, but in which there lurked a trace of sarcasm. “Probably it is that cheerfulness is now only a guest, and once was a member of the family.”

“Not only merely a guest, but a rare guest,” retorted Frau von Schönau, in my place; “because now people try to purchase his presence, and the more they pay for it the surer they feel of securing it.”

“Oh, well, I knew Fräulein von Schönerbrunn would not give us any pleasure without a moral tacked on to it,” said Bertha, sharply.

“We’ve had the pleasure, so never mind the moral,” laughed Wanda. “Ask us soon again,” she said, in her childlike way. “We’ll promise to bring cheerfulness, and *I* am going to bring my husband, for I’m not satisfied even with all these cavaliers.” She cast a laughing glance on the President, Joachim, and Dietrich, kissed her hand to the cadet, bade me an affectionate good-night, wrapped her pretty head in a most becoming hood, and took her departure, giving each one a kind word or a beaming look.

She is charming, but I wish sincerely that Bertha had a different sort of friend. Bertha’s is not one of

the natures that is improved by being spoiled. It makes her domineering and fosters the natural worldliness of her character. She is much less willing to accept a kindly word of reproof than she was when I first knew her. I have never pretended to give such, except when it was brought about naturally by some discussion or interchange of sentiment. At first she would occasionally yield her opinion, but now she always insists that she is in the right,—sometimes in a very disagreeable manner. Her mother shakes her finger at her, but regards her impertinence as wisdom. I now reply only by deep courtesies,—the deeper the more decided her rudeness, thus showing her that I am not entirely averse to form, after all. Really, I think I am quite capable of making a court reverence, and could be presented at once, so thoroughly does she keep me in practice.

The enthusiasm for the little Countess is universal in the family, and, though Dietrich and Joachim both say “she turns Bertha’s head, and is by no means a suitable companion for her,” Frau von Löben at once enters the lists against them.

“Apart from everything else,” she says, “what an advantage to the child when she goes into society next winter!” and then reproaches me for not showing more interest in this approaching grand occasion.

“You have only half a heart for us,” she said, the other day. “You are of a cold nature. You and I are as different as—as——” As she could not find a fitting simile, I said, “As an old-fashioned Dutch tile stove and a modern fireplace.”

"That is true!" she cried. "How quickly is a fire lighted in the fireplace, cheering every heart!"

"Yes," I retorted, "and how quickly is it extinguished, without constant replenishing! whereas the old stove, once heated, glows on with its even, comforting warmth through the whole long winter's day."

But equanimity is regarded as coldness by these straw-like natures. I am not wounded by the reproach, and I have a sort of presentiment that the day will come when Bertha will be glad to fly to the condemned old stove for relief from the biting cold; for Countess Wanda is born only for sunshine, and I see heavy clouds brooding over this house. Caroline said to me the other day, "What impudent people there are in this town! They often besiege young Herr Joachim's door, and when I tell them he is not at home, they won't believe *me*; and sometimes he is at home and won't show himself. But it's just like their Jewish impudence!"

I cannot say how this pains me. Of course I know what it means; but I don't know what to do about it. Shall I speak to Dietrich? But he is so little to be depended on just now; his manner and temper are so uneven that I should imagine him to be in similar difficulties, had not Frau von Löben given me a different key to the mystery. She says she believes that he had some idea of addressing a young lady of rank and great wealth, but that, ere he had fully decided so to do, another carried off the prize. The mother calls it an unfortunate speculation, and says

it is only pique and ill humor, for his heart was not interested. Perhaps she is in the wrong,—I am sure I hope so. I believe better things of Dietrich. To court a woman without loving her! What a pity if my young friend have thus done violence to his own fine character and fallen into one of the sins of the day! Perhaps the Jews are standing before his door also, and driving him to this wretched step. But how noble it is to seek a woman's best treasure, and offer nothing in return, only desiring it as a means of paying the usury on folly and extravagance!

FOURTEENTH LETTER.

THE President's friend has been here again, and has proved a friend worthy the name. It was delightful to see the pleasant, jovial way in which he strove to take some of the weight from the President's mind. All honor to friendship! True, it is a sober and a comparatively rare feeling between men, and in them lacks the fire usual in women's attachments; but what does that matter, if, when put to the test, it is not found wanting? I believe that men's hearts and women's hearts are of totally different construction. One is like a narrow, winding path, hard to enter and hard to leave,—the other, like a broad high-road, open to all. Both have their advantages and their disadvantages. Sometimes, with men, the passage is closed altogether,—a thing that rarely happens with us women, for the road is too wide and open.

As all the efforts of the police have not succeeded in discovering any traces of the robbers, the President insisted so pertinaciously upon forcing on his friend an acknowledgment of the sum stolen, that he could do nothing but accept it. He took it with a strange look. I am sure I am not wrong in supposing that the note will be destroyed over the President's grave, if not even sooner. The good old gentleman only remained two days, and now the former arrangements

are restored. My two little guests I resigned most unwillingly. Joachim has his old room, but not his old light-heartedness. He no longer sings me to sleep, but keeps me awake by walking up and down at all hours of the night. A few nights ago, I was awakened by the voices of the two brothers in excited conversation. Of course I could not understand a word, but I thought I heard Joachim sobbing. How is it possible that Frau von Löben should notice so little and treat so lightly the evident depression of her sons?

“Oh, they’re probably in debt,” she said to me, not long since. “Well, they’ll have to settle it for themselves; I sha’n’t interfere.”

Of course *I* cannot. Perhaps it is only my wish to be of some assistance that makes me imagine that Dietrich is seeking an opportunity to make a confidante of me. He looks at me sometimes as though he would gaze into my inmost soul. Well, I have nothing to conceal, so I do not refuse to the anxious eyes the encouraging glance they seem to seek. But I can do no more. When the fruit is ripe, it falls from the tree. Ah, here comes Dietrich, just as I was writing of him, and begs an interview. He is in full uniform, but looks like a chief mourner. I have given him my arm-chair, a favor I do not always vouchsafe him, and have begged permission to finish this sentence. So I must stop now, but after awhile will tell you the result.

——Later.—Prepare to be astonished, my dear Count! But you will not be more so than I have

been. I feel precisely as though I had been reading a chapter in a particularly trashy novel; however, all's well that ends well. I closed my writing-desk, and seated myself on the sofa with a dignity suited to the elegance of my visitor's costume. He seemed very much embarrassed, and I purposely began to talk of various indifferent things, so as to give him time to recover; but it was of no avail. He twisted about on my favorite arm-chair till I trembled for its safety and was on the point of going to the kitchen and getting him a three-legged stool. He turned over all my books and made dog's-ears in them,—a thing that invariably drives me to desperation. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but did not, and stared at me as though I were an outlandish animal which he had to describe before some learned society. I felt half amused, half sympathizing; but at last he seized a pair of scissors and began to bore a hole in my beloved arm-chair. This was really too much, and I snatched them from his hand, exclaiming,—

“What is the matter with you, to-day?”

His tongue seemed suddenly loosed, and a most extraordinary stream of disjointed sentences followed,—something about love and respect, his parents, his brothers and sisters, myself, and dear knows what else; and the more I stared, trying in vain to discover whether he really had gone crazy or not, the more confused did his words grow. At last he brought out something that sounded like a request for my nand.

"Whom am I to marry?" I asked; "you, or Joachim, or George?"

Indeed, why not the cadet? If I intend losing my wits at all, I may just as well do the thing thoroughly. He tried to look as resentful as he could, and stammered something about his dearest wish,—my great kindness, which had encouraged him to the step,—and actually had the impudence to say he had hoped to find my heart not utterly unimpressed! My only answer was,—

"How much are you in debt?"

"Are you, then, so very cautious, or what do you take me for?" he exclaimed, springing to his feet; but, seeing me perfectly unconcerned, he sat down again.

"Neither cautious nor short-sighted," I replied; "and therefore I ask, How much do your debts amount to, and have you no other means of paying them than by marrying a poor, crooked old woman? For shame! for shame!"

"You do injustice to yourself and to me," he said. "I am not actuated merely by venal motives, and you—you are not old, and you exaggerate your misfortune. I could tell you of several of my companions-in-arms who have never remarked it, but *have* remarked your attractive appearance."

"And so my poor person was submitted to the judgment of a committee of your friends, ere you finally concluded to do me this overpowering honor! Delightful!" I interrupted.

"No one knows of my action save Joachim," he answered.

“And does he vouchsafe his approval?” I asked, growing extremely angry.

“He knows, like myself, that you are worthy of all love and of all honor,” he answered, earnestly; “and that is the thing of most importance. I know plenty of young wives who have made their husbands very unhappy. You are certainly not more than six years my senior, and I know a lady who was twelve years older than her husband, and yet survived him.”

“And you regard that as a part of conjugal happiness, to outlive one’s husband? What an original view of the subject! It is perfectly indifferent to me what other people have done or have not done. I follow the dictates of my own heart.”

And now I bestowed upon him a severe lecture, and spared him none the more for feeling most kindly towards him in my secret heart, and, although I would not marry him, desiring to bring him to a sense of the disgracefulness of the proceeding, and then to help him out of his troubles. But in the midst of my lecture, while my so-called lover sat listening like a school-boy in disgrace, half defiant, half ashamed, and without answering a word, I was so overpowered all of a sudden with a sense of the utter ludicrousness of the situation that I threw myself back and laughed until I cried. Now he became furious.

“How can you treat me so?” he exclaimed. “Am I a child? I offer you the best gifts a man *can* offer, —my hand, my name——”

"Many thanks," I interrupted. "But I find two hands quite sufficient, and am perfectly satisfied with my own name; and in any case the gifts would be utterly worthless to me without one which you have forgotten,—the heart."

He opened his mouth to make some reply, but could only bring out something about "respect." I did not allow him to proceed, but, having now completely recovered my equilibrium, went on with my lecture. I had laughed away all my anger, and a feeling of friendly compassion took its place. I paid no attention to his embarrassment, contradictions, or arguments. Gradually the truth came out. I brought him to a sense of the absurdity and sin of his conduct, and then the rest followed of its own accord. The story is a sad one enough. He is in debt, and, I think, to a considerable amount; but it was not that which drove him to the step; his necessities are not pressing, and are not of a character to endanger his standing as an officer, and so he dresses the whole future in blue and gold, and hopes that a thousand different things may occur, any one of which would release him from his difficulties. But another and a more pressing trouble came upon him, driving the poor fellow to attack this unprotected female, and to demand, not "my money *or* my life," but both, after the most approved method of modern fashionable highway-robbery. In few words, the case is as follows. The boy Joachim is also in debt. For what? Why, what does a youth of his age not want? Cigars to smoke while studying, patent-leather boots and kid

gloves for balls—perfumes, pomades, etc. Trifles, perhaps, in themselves, but they make a hole in the money, especially when the easy method of having them “charged” is resorted to. Several hundred thalers are easily squandered, above all by an elegant young gentleman like Joachim, who wears none but kid gloves and the most stylish coats, to whom any but the most spotless linen is a genuine affliction, and who is compelled at every sudden shower to take a droschke for the sake of all these elegant articles; who ornaments his room with a thousand expensive trifles; whom nothing would induce to buy his school-books at a second-hand establishment, but who insists on purchasing the most elegantly-bound editions, and has them rebound as soon as a spot appears upon them; and, finally, who visits concerts and theatres to an unlimited extent. This has been going on for a long time; but the attack of love for the handsome Englishwoman brought things to a climax. It is startling to see what the boy has spent at the florist’s alone,—the one who provided him with the bouquets for his fair flame. Even his mother has her flowers purchased in market, and arranges them herself. But the young gentleman has neither time nor taste for such work, and, besides, he regards this pastoral employment as unmanly.

“But who would lend such a child money?” I could not help exclaiming.

“Not honest people, I am sorry to say,” said Dietrich, sadly; and explained to me the tortuous windings of such affairs, and the danger to honor,

reputation, and happiness incurred by those who enter the fatal labyrinth.

The boy was soon in the greatest embarrassment. Discovery threatened, and of course, in consequence, expulsion from the "Gymnasium;" and he dared not apply to his father. It appeared that some time ago he was in a similar predicament, and the discovery had distressed the President so bitterly that they really trembled for the consequences of this improved edition of Joachim's former delinquency. Once become confidential, Dietrich went on to tell me another circumstance, which made an appeal to the President really out of the question. You remember the scene I wrote you of, some time since, about the theatre-tickets? Dietrich followed his father from the room, fearing lest the excitement should cause him a hemorrhage, as had happened once before on his suffering great annoyance concerning some official business. Fortunately, this was not the case; but this anxiety was exchanged for another, and it was with trembling lips that Dietrich told me what all save he and myself are ignorant of. His father fears that he will be compelled to resign his position. He has struggled long against this conviction, seeing the absolute necessity for the step, and yet procrastinating and postponing it for his family's sake; and, although his health grows weaker and weaker every day, still he struggles on. Dietrich had been thunderstruck at this information (for they all seem blinded to the sufferings of the poor man, either from having grown accustomed to them, or else by their own sanguine

dispositions), yet had the good sense to cheer and encourage the sick man as much as possible. He begged and urged upon him to take a three months' leave, to visit some watering-place, and on his return to see if his health would permit of his retaining his office. At last he consented. His son argued him out of his pecuniary scruples, and, unhappily at a sacrifice of truth, set his mind at rest as to his own circumstances, and thus finally won from him the desired promise.

"If my father resigns, it will be signing his death-warrant," said Dietrich, with tears in his eyes. "For then he will give up entirely, and the disease will have full play. And, oh, how hard it will be for him to die! If you only could have heard him the other day! He has no thought save for us; he has fairly carried my mother in his arms all her married life! Who can ever take his place with her? His distress about her and us is heart-rending, and every sacrifice must be made to set his mind at rest."

The poor fellow with difficulty repressed his tears; and, in my deep sympathy for him and for them all, I forgot the folly and extravagance that had sapped the foundations of this frail edifice.

To return to Joachim. Dietrich was his only hope; he applied to him for help, and he gave it,—which was brotherly enough, but utterly unreflecting; for he himself had nothing but debts, and consequently had no honorable means of procuring the money. But the money was procured, and his word given as security the last resource in such cases, so he told me. He never

would have done this for himself; but his brother needed his help, and before the note fell due something might turn up. So he argued. Nothing did turn up. Twice was the note renewed, and the debt increased; now something *must* be done; the rest you know. I was shocked at the abyss on the brink of which these two really talented and promising young men stood, and at the danger that they would pay for temporary levity with the happiness and prosperity of their whole lives.

"This has been going on for months," said Dietrich. "I have for a long time seen the pressing necessity of putting an end to the disgraceful affair. I am the eldest; I *must* do something for my brothers and sisters, and I cannot without money; so last winter I had some idea of seeking the hand of a young lady for whom I had a far less warm feeling than I have for you——"

"The more shame to you!" I cried.

"But she married some one else——"

"And the calculation didn't come out right," I interrupted; and, really provoked by his frankness, which, after all, was the most creditable part of the whole concern, I continued: "Even if I were vain enough to consider myself capable of inspiring a passion in a young heart, or so eager to be married as to accept the first who offered, how would your position be improved? One debt would be paid, it is true, but you would have contracted a heavier one. We do not with impunity trifle with our neighbor's happiness, my friend."

Again came that dreadful "respect" which the poor fellow tries to use as a sort of plaster for my wounded pride.

"I would never have done it, had I not respected you deeply and hoped to become through you a better man. Indeed, I am so already."

"Thanks; I believe I *do* see some improvement; but a pupil is not apt to marry his school-mistress."

"I have, indeed, learned much from you," he said, in his frank way.

"Well, then, learn something more; learn that like seeks like, and that love, and love alone, should be the cause of marriage."

"That is rarely the case nowadays," he said, "at least in our rank of life; there are too many demands upon us for us to be free to choose."

"Every one can be free to choose, if he have character enough to throw aside the superfluities that have nothing to do with real happiness, and if he be willing to resign meretricious show and display for solid home comfort."

"And if he could do all this," asked the young man, "where is the woman who would pledge herself to such a lot, or who has been fitted by her bringing-up to be happy in unpretentiousness so unsuited to her rank?"

"That I cannot say," I was compelled to answer; "but this I do know, that he who seeks will find, and I am sure that simplicity and modesty will attract the like-minded, just as folly draws around her her own frivolous court."

Dietrich seemed lost in thought. "Even acknowledging all this," he said, suddenly, "that is not all. I cannot forget the future; and how could I bring up my children suitably, if I married a portionless, or even a moderately well-off, girl? Remember my father! See how anxiety and care are robbing his last days of rest and peace."

"Bring them up to be useful men and women, and then they will not only be fitted for any station, but will do it honor," I answered. "That is the best security for their future, and, indeed, the only one which I think parents owe to their children. No man is bound to win a fortune for his children, if he have given them the means to gain their daily bread. That is their surest capital. Look around you in the world: what the fathers struggle for, the children squander; many a sigh, many a care of the mother is woven in the daughter's finery, and many a fair hope is blasted by idleness and spendthrift habits. Who teaches the children from their very cradle to drink champagne, to wear silk, and to scorn putting their hands to honest labor? And is there in the oft-repeated song a solitary note of true content?"

He said something about the necessities of our station, but that he was sure many longed to break the chains that bound them.

I could hardly help smiling.

"You hang the chains on your own limbs," I said, "and turn even love into a mere traffic, and then talk of 'longing for release.' As for the requirements of your station, high and honorable must they be! For

they must be complied with, even with the assistance of Jews, notes of hand, and broken hearts."

He bit his lips, yet restrained himself, and continued, quietly,—

"You must not undervalue these requirements. As members of a body, we are forced to submit to the laws that govern it. I cannot live as a solitary in my corps; I cannot exclude myself from association with my brother officers; and, when they have any common object in view, I cannot refuse to contribute my share of the expense, whether it be beyond my means or not. I acknowledge that, had I sufficient character and self-denial, I could withdraw from many expensive pleasures, and might give up many habits not suited to my circumstances. I need not attempt to vie with those who are supposed to represent my rank in society,—although all this would be very hard; but there are many things from which, out of feeling for my comrades, I could not possibly exclude myself. Besides, who takes the trouble to inquire what our income is, when custom has settled how much we must spend? We float with the tide. The wind carries us on; and over that we have no influence."

"Are you, then, a weathercock?" I asked. "If so, go on turning obediently; if not, tread your own path bravely. Where the stream is too strong for you to breast, is no place for you."

The poor fellow looked distressed and sighed deeply.

"But what is a poor devil to do," he said, "when

he has not even enough to keep up a proper appearance,—not to speak of pleasures and enjoyments?”

I could not help thinking that he had chosen very improper means to make a proper appearance; but I kept the thought to myself, for I concluded I had talked enough, and that it was now time to act. It was a difficult matter to persuade him to accept my assistance, even for Joachim; for himself he refused it absolutely. Indeed, I doubt if I should have been able to do much good; for you know I am not exactly rich. I had not with me even as much as Joachim required, but gave Dietrich a check on my banker. He took it with tears of shame, though I tried to treat the matter as lightly as possible.

“Is that little sum of money of more value than myself?” I asked, jestingly. “You were willing to take *me*.”

“I would have made you happy, upon my honor,” he said.

“I will attend to my own happiness, thank you. Do you take care of yours.”

He stood hesitatingly before me. “May I still count on your friendship?” he asked.

“Indeed you may,” I answered, giving him my hand.

He returned in five minutes, bringing Joachim with him. I purposely had not forbidden his telling the boy the author of his relief. I had no ambition to play the secret benefactress,—not on account of the thanks, but because I hoped that my knowledge of the affair might spur him on to amendment. I did

not rightly appreciate how much the poor fellow had suffered, until I saw his joy at his release; and his principal thought seemed to be that his father would be spared the distress of hearing of his misconduct.

"That was the worst of all," he said, with real emotion. I tried to deepen the impression by recalling to his mind the peril in which he had placed his brother. He really had been ignorant of this, for Dietrich had said nothing to him of it. Noble-minded again, but, as usual, in the wrong direction. Why should he have concealed from Joachim the possible results of his conduct? I know *I* should have let it cost him just as much anxiety as possible. It was touching to see the two brothers together,—the one in his gratitude and contrition, the other striving to cheer up the poor little sinner as much as possible.

"Never, never will I get into debt again," declared Joachim. "I will be a regular scamp if I do. Yes, Fräulein Hildegard, you can call me a scamp if I do!" And then, running from the room, he returned with his elegant cigar-case, and begged me to keep it for him.

"I won't smoke another cigar until I can ransom the case with my debt to you," he declared, in the most solemn manner. I took it, and treated the vow as a serious matter, although I could hardly help laughing at the boy's emphasis. Then we sat down, and the two bestowed upon me such confidences as a mother receives from her sons. The *naïveté* of their confessions was really touching. I must have been a sort of female Solomon, to give the

amount of good advice expected of me. "Children," I said, "you are happy in that you have a home and parents; cling to them as much as possible; let them always be in your thoughts, and be at home and with your family just as much as you can."

"But our parents are so little at home," said Dietrich, sadly.

He said no more; and I too was silent, for I did not care to go more deeply into his family affairs, lest I should show him shadows where it is best he should see only light. That piety which should be the foundation of all the relations of life should inspire a respectful reverence towards parents, even past the unreasoning years. Piety does not blind us to their faults, but tenderly covers them with the mantle of love. It does not condemn; it hardly even judges, and silently ascribes all failings to the human, and therefore erring, nature of those to whom God has given their authority.

It certainly is a phase of the universal disregard of old landmarks, the contempt of time-honored boundary-lines, that the children now assert their own opinion against that of their parents, and that, in the independence they claim so early, they place instinct in stead of experience, and set up their own judgment in opposition to those older and wiser than themselves. I blame the unwise parents who permit or encourage this. I blame the unfilial children who are not restrained by love and duty. I pity the times that have to bear the fruit. The poisoned root is in the family circle, but its top reaches up to heaven;

for the contempt of home authority becomes contempt of social rules and disregard of human law, perhaps at last of divine law also. "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." How often do I think of the commandment as I look on the tottering pillars upon which rests this home! They are crumbling and rotten. The mother is wrapped up in this world, and her affections set wholly on things beneath. How can she prove the guardian angel, ennobling, exalting, and improving those dear to her? Helpless, characterless, a dark future lies before her,—a future in which she should be her children's guiding star. My dear Count, I often think, Heaven be praised that I have no husband nor children, for the husband and children of Frau von Löben cause me anxiety enough! No, indeed, I do not complain of this little burden upon my shoulder, for perhaps it has spared me a far heavier one on my heart.

FIFTEENTH LETTER.

ARE you not out of all patience with my letters? You know you told me to let you read every line in my book of life, and, without regard to rhetoric, to allow my pen to chatter as my tongue used to. Communicativeness is born in our sex; it is the stream on which we float over many of the sorrows and difficulties of life. But if the stream burst its bounds, what then? Scandal and gossip are the results. There are only too many such streams; and woe unto those who fall into the muddy current, for it will leave them spotted and defiled.

How hard it is, with our better knowledge, to out-argue the natural logic of an unschooled mind!

"That's a false representation of the world," said Caroline, as she was dusting my globes the other day. "How do they make a ball of it, I'd like to know?"

"Caroline," I announced, gravely, "the earth is round, and revolves."

"Heaven forbid! What a tumbling about there would be!"

I showed her a fly, which very obligingly, as if expressly to furnish me with an illustration, was taking a promenade on the under side of the globe.

"Oh, yes, I've often seen them; but they have

hooks on their feet, and we are not flies," she answered, completely overthrowing my practical illustration. I came to the conclusion that any further scientific explanations would be thrown away.

"Plenty of things in the world are upside down," I said. She understood me instantaneously.

"To be sure they are," she answered; "but everything that is, is sure to fall, sooner or later; there's no help for it."

"But we may stretch out our arms to support the falling," I said, thinking aloud, as it were.

"Your arms are so delicate and thin," she said, patting them compassionately, "that I don't believe they'd do much good. Just you use mine when you want them; that's the best way. The head is the master, and the limbs are the servants."

"Those are not all that are necessary, though," I said.

"No, indeed," she answered. "Without a good heart and a good digestion, the head is upset and the limbs are weak and good for nothing. People can stand on their heads a little while, but they cannot go forward in that way; and so it's better everything should stand properly and in its own place."

She looked at me askance, as if wondering if I understood her real meaning. If everybody had her sound head, it would make little difference whether the world revolved or not.

But the way that I came to make Caroline the text of to-day's letter is, that through her means the thief has at last been discovered. It is difficult to

tell yet how much will be recovered; but the criminals are in safe keeping, and Caroline may justly claim all the credit. I will let her speak for herself.

“Such a thing as has happened to me!” she exclaimed, bursting into my room the other day on returning from an errand. “I was going to that big dry-goods store,—I don’t know the name, but you’ve read about it in the papers,—in Albrecht Street, where you get things almost for nothing, though they all come from Paris,—a cheap place Paris must be! Well, I was anxious to know what some neckerchiefs that you get for nothing would cost; so I went in. I hadn’t on any silk gown or satin bonnet, so I had to wait; for you could see from my dress that I was a servant. But I didn’t mind waiting, for I like to watch people, and when I go out that is my idle time, and I like to learn something. So I stood there, watching all the finely-dressed ladies sitting buying things, and the elegant gentlemen that stood selling them, and how they said the price of this was three guilders, and then, after talking for ever so long, took one guilder for it; and then I began to understand what buying things for nothing meant. And you *can* buy them for nothing, too, because they have plenty of worthless things, and if you let yourself be talked over into getting them, you have bought them for nothing, that’s certain. Yes, I’ve got two good eyes in my head, and I’m not going to buy cobwebs for linen, I can tell you. Well, only just think, while I was standing there, there was a man not far off, and his back was turned to me, but I felt sure I’d seen

him some place. While I was trying to think about it, I saw something queer about his movements—I never saw such a quick way as he had, too. He was putting on his glove as he was standing by the counter. It was a very small glove, and fell down twice before he could get it on; and as he picked it up I saw that he had picked up something else, I couldn't see what, at the same time. I was rubbing my eyes, wondering if I saw right, when he turned around, and, lo and behold! it was Henrietta's young man,—the friend of that rogue of a Runnstädter, who wears his master's clothes instead of brushing them. So I just tried to look as if it wasn't me, and stepped behind a stout lady, so he couldn't see me. I had just before my eyes a great bunch of dark-red velvet and loops and bugles,—the lady's bonnet, I mean; but I peeped through a little hole between two of the bows, though the beads were so shiny they hurt my eyes. I was in a great state, for I wasn't quite sure whether he really was stealing or not; but I thought to myself, 'You just watch and see, and, if he is, catch him before he can get out.' But that moment a lady dropped her handkerchief, and he stooped and handed it to her as polite as you please; but I saw as he gave it to her he had a pocket-book in his hand he'd not had there before, and like a flash he put it in his pocket. The other day, when you sent me to the theatre, in the piece there was a man arrested. Some one came out and put his hand on his shoulder and said, 'In the name of the king, you are my prisoner.' But I thought that couldn't be the right way

here; for what has the king to do with a thief? And, besides, I suppose he wasn't my prisoner, exactly; so I did it differently. I seized him by the arm, and cried, just as loud as I could, 'Hold him fast! He's stealing.' All the fine ladies sprang up as though he was going to murder them, and he tried to push me down and run. But I'm from the country, and he's only a thin sort of fellow, so I held him tight till the gentlemen behind the counter called in help, and then they had him fast enough; and they turned out his pockets, and there was the pocket-book, and ever so much lace and ribbon that he had bought 'for nothing.' And only think! you may believe me or not, but the rascal had all the silver that was stolen, and the rest of them were in with him. I've thought so for a long time; but, until one is certain of those things, it isn't well to spoil any one's character."

Ah, Caroline, if every one were but of that opinion, perhaps many criminals might escape, but we at least would be freed from that vile sin called calumny!

Caroline was right. The discovery of the one thief brought the whole matter to light, for he gave up his two accomplices, the "Jubileer," as Joachim insists upon calling my friend Runnstädter since his "jubilée," and Henrietta, the servant, who, being pardoned for her first trivial dishonesties, was thereby encouraged to become thus bold and enterprising. They are all three in custody; but I doubt if they feel quite so jovial as when I surprised them at the tea-table some time ago. I only hope that the President may recover his money.

About the silver, Frau von Löben says,—

“I should be rather sorry than otherwise to recover it, for I had set my heart on getting some more fashionable instead.”

She is much provoked at the whole affair, and really indignant with Caroline for having, as she says, “deprived her of an excellent servant.”

Of course the children are in the greatest excitement. Arthur never permits Clärchen to come across the corridor to my door without accompanying her with a drawn sabre; and they have acted the whole thing so often, from beginning to end (changing, however, with poetic license, the dry-goods store into a bakery), that I have been compelled to interdict the play. The fact is, it was rather hard on Clärchen, for Arthur was the thief, and promptly devoured the stolen goods, and she, poor little thing, as the keeper of the store, was thus regularly deprived of her share of cake, and, with her usual lovely, uncomplaining self-sacrifice, quietly contented herself with a piece of bread. So few people in this world are self-sacrificing, and of those few such a very, very small part exercise the virtue unostentatiously, scarcely acknowledging it to themselves even, that I could not bear to sully so beautiful a case of the virtue by calling her little brother's attention to the injustice of his conduct, so quietly put a stop to the game instead. Besides, Arthur was growing alarmingly skilful in abstracting and concealing the stolen goods, and I considered it much better that this branch of talent should be left undeveloped.

Caroline came near regretting her heroism, for she was, of course, summoned as witness. I don't know what horrors she expected, but when the summons came she turned ashy pale, and said,—

“I feel as though I was going into battle.”

“You would not hesitate in that case,” I said.

“Indeed and I would, then; what are you thinking of, Fräulein Hildegard? If the bullets began to whiz about me, I should run, to a certainty!”

“Caroline,” I said, struggling with laughter, “think of the glory!”

“What good would the glory do me if they shot off my leg? Would it give me a new one? and could I wait on you with only one leg?”

Sound logic, to which I could not reply, especially as she, by her own request, has been supplying Henrietta's place since that lady's arrest, as well as fulfilling all her other duties. It was by this means that peace was made between Frau von Löben and myself, for we nearly had a serious quarrel. She cannot abide my Caroline, in revenge for my small appreciation of her Henrietta, and displays this prejudice in the most unjust and unreasonable way. She cannot say anything against Caroline's character or her efficiency, so she attacks the poor creature's manners, which, she declares, are entirely too familiar. In vain do I urge that I have known the old woman since my childhood, regard her as one of my best friends, and have an almost filial attachment for her. It is all of no avail; so I keep to my opinion, and she keeps to hers.

After Henrietta's arrest, the unpardonable confidence came to light which Frau von Löben had placed in a person already known to be dishonest. The President learned, for the first time, the innumerable trifling thefts of which she had been guilty, and, naturally enough, was indignant that Frau von Löben should not long since have discharged her. I never saw him so angry; and his wife defended herself all the more violently for feeling conscious of being in the wrong. Perhaps his ill health makes him less capable of controlling himself, or perhaps the measure of silently-borne discomfort was now full. Be that as it may, it is certain that he spoke some bitter truths, without the slightest regard for my presence. I was most anxious to make my escape; but, in the eagerness of dispute and the excitement of passion, Frau von Löben had seized one of my hands and held it in a vice-like grasp.

"Two-thirds of our income are swallowed up by the world," said the President, "and it may be so and welcome, if it gives you any pleasure,—though there is little enjoyment in such pleasures, after all; but when you, in unpardonable carelessness or thoughtlessness, keep in your employ those whom you know to be dishonest, you sin against my life, for it will not last much longer to win that which you so lightly throw away. Your spendthrift habits and careless housekeeping keep us straitened, even with a comfortable income; then what will become of you, deprived of all support, and incapable of doing anything for yourself? Oh, how hard it is to die when our beloved

are left as mine will be!" he burst forth, in agony no longer to be repressed. "Is a solitary one of my children capable of making his way without me? Tell me, do *you* think so, Fräulein von Schönerbrunn?" he exclaimed, turning, to my dismay, towards me. "The little ones will grow up like the others, —good children enough, and perhaps not without talents; but what is there to develop them? Heads full of extravagant ideas which they have no means of gratifying; the world full of folly and wickedness, and always readier to crush all good than to encourage or call it forth, even if that have not already been done at home by their own family!"

He looked at me, as if awaiting an answer.

"If God be for them, who can be against them?" I murmured, as the only reply I knew how to make.

"True, true!" he answered, as the tears ran down his cheeks; "but there is no excuse for the carelessness of those who see the weeds growing tall and strong, and yet do not give the sickle into their children's hands to mow them down, or the spade to prepare the ground! If the better seed ever spring up, it will be through God's grace alone. It is hard to die with a sin on the conscience, even when it is only one of omission!"

With these words he left the room. Frau von Löben burst into tears. Is it only sickness which has so deprived him of energy, or has he always been thus powerless to oppose an evil which it is evident he sees and mourns over? Frau von Löben unconsciously answered my thought.

"I don't know what is the matter with him, or what he requires of me, all of a sudden," she said. "I was always just as I am now, and he never found any fault. But he is a hypochondriac; that is all. You don't think him really sick?"

Fortunately, she went on without waiting for an answer, for what could I have said? With as impartial a glance as possible, I contemplated the life-picture she unrolled before me. Love, romance, a light heart, enjoyment of life, were the prominent features; and whatever her carelessness neglected, or her fantastic whims desired, met with neither a reproach nor an obstacle. She bemoaned the loss of this sympathy, as she called it, which, she said, had made her married life without a cloud; and I could not but think that the cloud would not lower so darkly now, had it not been for the former deceitful, dazzling glare. Sympathy in everything good, reasonable, and noble is, doubtless, a firm foundation for conjugal happiness; but sympathy in folly only doubles its baneful influence. But the poor President is a hopelessly weak character. He allows himself to drift with the stream, has only the negative strength of love, and would rather make a hundred unreasonable sacrifices than require one sensible one. He has thrown his better consciousness aside, but now it rushes back upon him with resistless might. In the gloom involuntarily we strain our sight. Perhaps in the gloom of approaching death much becomes clear to the gaze which in the daylight of life is seen with indistinctness. As long as the President

was strong and able to work for his dear ones and care for their support, he was willing to take the labor and leave them the enjoyment. That was his mistake, for which his present distress and anxiety are a bitter penance. Poor man!

I was sunk in these sad thoughts, when Frau von Löben began again to speak. Fancy my consternation at hearing the following words:—

“Yes! and I owe all this to your dreadful old Caroline! What business had she spying out thieves in my house? It is all her fault that I had to send off Henrietta, and that my husband has scolded me, —a thing he never did before in his whole life. All her fault! Will you not discharge the meddlesome old person?”

I could not help laughing at this modest request, and, fortunately, the great child at my side was not so lost to all reason as to get angry at my amusement. On the contrary, she laughed, too, although the tears were running down her cheeks, and threw her arms around my neck, looking like a personified April day, when I said that, instead of discharging poor Caroline, I was anxious for Frau von Löben to accept her services until she could procure another servant.

“What a friend in need you are!” she exclaimed. “Then I will not have the torment of a new servant for a little while, anyhow. Oh, I’m so glad! And now I’ll go and make friends with my husband, and scold him for frightening us. Don’t go; I’ll be back directly.”

I am perfectly familiar with her definition of "directly," but it is all the same to me whether I knit my stocking in my own room or hers; so I remained. In about an hour she returned, all sunshine.

"It's all right," she said; "I'm to be as happy as I choose, and the children too. There's nothing the matter with him, nor with us. He's only not very well, and is going to ask a leave of absence to go to the country. But I sha'n't let him go to the country, —it's too tiresome; he must go to some watering-place, and take us all with him. Dietrich must get leave, too, and we can enjoy ourselves together!"

I can write no more, my dear Count, but I know you sympathize with the distress with which I watch this mouldering column patched with cement and painted with gaudy colors. But it must fall soon; and what then?

K*

SIXTEENTH LETTER.

BERTHA'S confirmation, which was delayed by the illness of the officiating ecclesiastic, is just over. The ceremony in the church was solemn and beautiful, and the conduct of the whole family, especially of Bertha, showed respect for the seriousness of the occasion; but the crossing of the threshold of the sanctuary was not the first step into a graver life, a life requiring in its various phases all the powers of heart and soul. No, it was only the entrance into "the world." The day was celebrated, like a birthday, by the presentation of beautiful gifts,—not a bad custom, in its way. Why should not those who are interested in the fair young candidate display that interest by the presentation of appropriate offerings? It is indeed a birthday; the seal of completion is pressed upon the Christian work on heart and mind, and now it must go forth to exert its powers, to develop and grow in the temptations and trials of the outer world. Now it no longer walks hand-in-hand with physical development; that has ceased. Give toys and trifles to children; surely more noble gifts belong to the day of confirmation than the gauds and gew-gaws of fashion. But here these were seen in rich quantities. Even the watch was not wanting; although Bertha's pleasure in it was changed to anger by a

foolish speech of the little cadet, who, as a watch is frequently a bridal gift, declared that his sister was taking her wedding-presents in advance.

The black dress, which Bertha had determined, in a paroxysm of industry, to make up herself, was finished by the seamstress after all. Bertha's energy gave out after finishing two seams.

"Hell is paved with good intentions," I said to her, as she observed, in some embarrassment, that she had had the best intentions in the world, but that something had always happened to prevent.

"This time it really could not be helped," said the injudicious mother, always prepared with an excuse.

This time it could not be helped, nor another time, nor yet another. When? When she must. So many think in the same way; but the power does not always come with the necessity, and those who have accustomed themselves to regular activity can accomplish, without fatigue, three times what can be done by those upon whom labor has suddenly been forced.

The cadet, who was here for the confirmation, has gone again, but a guest of more importance still remains,—no less a person than the "rich aunt." Frau von Löben invited her, so as to neglect no means of propitiation, but in the full conviction that she was too ailing and too morose to accept. If I ever in my life formed a false idea of a person, it was of Aunt Ludovika. There was nothing of the stiff gravity of her picture, and no trace of melancholy, not even of depression. She is in the prime of life, in robust health, and if the silver-gray silk dress which she

always wears really be mourning, it is not even half-mourning,—not more than an eighth, I should think. She does not seem self-deceiver enough for such affectation. Her two nephews, who saw her for the last time only six months ago, are perfectly amazed at the change in their bereaved relation.

The letter announcing her visit did not arrive until the day named for it. She requested that they would engage her a room in a hotel; but the President's hospitality and family feeling would not allow this. Fortunately, we had already tried the experiment of accommodating an unexpected guest; otherwise Frau von Löben would have been completely beside herself. But now the arrangements were quickly made, and in a few hours from the receipt of the letter, lovely garlands of flowers were already hanging over the door of the room; and Frau von Löben, as she sighed deeply and said, "I wish she was in Guinea," gave the finishing touch to the wire letters forming the word "Welcome," which were to be trimmed with mosses and hung in the guest's chamber.

They made great preparations for this aunt's reception. I don't know whether they try to impress her because she is rich and they do not wish to be out-done, or because they think that rich people are so attached to their money that they object to leaving it where it will only relieve poverty, but prefer doing so where it will have a chance to be added to and increased. Frau von Löben insisted that I should be present at the reception (and indeed I was very anxious to meet the lady on whom so many hopes

rested), declaring in her own gracious way that I was one of the family. Dietrich and Joachim met the guest at the dépôt. In considerable solemnity we awaited her,—the little ones in an agony of suspense and impatience to see if the aunt would bring them anything. I really think that I expected the portrait to step from its frame, with the peculiar rigidity of face and figure that we often see in photographs. Instead of this, a quick, active, round-faced little creature plunged into the room, laughing and crying at once, and embraced everybody in succession, and with such vehemence that Arthur, struggling in her arms, cried to me,—

“Take her off, Aunt Hildegard! take her off! she’s choking me!”

She let him go, after rewarding his boyish frankness with a hearty kiss. Then followed such a stream of chatter that I really could distinguish nothing, save her desire to meet her relatives again and to see the little ones. She ran on like a mill-wheel, till Frau von Löben took advantage of a momentary pause to convey her away to take off her bonnet. Bertha accompanied her. The little ones were following, when they were restrained by a glance from their mother; but the aunt, with the greatest tenderness, begged that they might be allowed to come.

“I have some papers to look over,” said the President to his sons, “and must go into the office. Call me when tea is ready.”

I suspect the poor man was glad of an excuse to escape from the lively chatter of his new guest. As

soon as he had left, the two young men began to indulge their long-suppressed merriment.

"She is a different being! She seems to have taken a new lease on life," said Dietrich.

"She's either going to die or get married! What on earth can be the matter?" cried Joachim.

It appeared later that Aunt Ludovika, by the treatment of a new star in the medical world, had been completely cured of her liver-complaint, and restored to the full enjoyment of health. She talked with tears in her eyes of her gratitude for her restoration, of how differently life appeared to her in the light of recovered health. I'm afraid there was a severe struggle in Frau von Löben's heart between her sympathy and her maternal love, as she listened to her sister-in-law's words and read on her blooming cheeks the death-sentence of all her hopes. She understood perfectly a mischievous look that I gave her, and answered it with a nod and a blush; but at the conclusion of Aunt Ludovika's next speech she retorted with a glance of triumph.

"Before my recovery, I had not sufficient energy to come to a decision on any subject, even when it affected my interest. I loaded myself with unnecessary burdens, only for the pleasure of sighing over them; but now I'm determined to shake off as much as possible all the cares that a single woman must find in the management of a large property."

Frau von Löben was evidently delighted with this speech, thinking that it referred to the long-talked-of estate. How ignorant of the world, with all her

worldliness! A poor man would sooner give away his last garment than a rich man any portion of his superfluities, for the former knows what it is to be in need. I do not mean, however, to blame the aunt, or any other rich person, for not complying with such expectations as Frau von Löben's, even when, as in this case, they are supported by the idea that the wishes of the dead should be respected.

But to return to my young people. When Aunt Ludovika first entered the room, I had stared at Joachim with wonder and amazement. He had adopted the most extraordinary style of dress; his hair was smoothed and drawn behind his ears like that of a candidate for the ministry; he wore a white cravat, and had assumed an indescribably priggish manner, that amazed as much as it amused me. He burst into a merry laugh when she had left the room, as he caught my eyes resting on him in wondering speculation.

"I'm legacy-hunting!" he said. "My aunt used to be fond of this priestly, demure style; but I'm inclined to think that curls stand a better chance now."

He passed his hand through his hair, and the usual heavy curls reappeared under his fingers. Both the boys were so amazed at the alteration in their aunt that they could talk of nothing else.

"She has grown young again," said Dietrich, "and that in six months!"

"Farewell legacies!" sighed Joachim. "I was only jesting; may she live long and be happy!" he added, hastily.

It was some time before the aunt re-entered. She had unpacked and distributed beautiful presents among the children. Arthur appeared with a huge box of candy, and, as he drew his tongue over an empty kiss-paper, said, with feeling,—

“I love her; she has such good sugar-plums.”

I soon saw that the talkativeness of Aunt Ludovika, as well as her excited manner, had been assumed to hide a certain embarrassment. The first meeting over, she became more dignified, and rather taciturn than talkative. Many persons think it shows a want of affection not to plunge at once into a depth of intimacy with relatives, which only time and long acquaintance justify. I liked the aunt much better when she lost some of her extreme liveliness and ceased to talk only for the sake of talking. She seemed then a kind-hearted and sensible person. But there is some feeling of restraint, the cause of which has not yet appeared.

She has been here for three days, and remains till next Saturday. This evening the Löbens passed with me. To-morrow there is a large company at the President's; and day after to-morrow, that being the last of Aunt Ludovika's stay, she has refused all invitations, declaring she wishes to pass it among her family, of which I am considered a member. Frau von Löben has been looking forward to that evening in the greatest state of excitement. She expected that her sister-in-law would then announce her intentions. Until this evening she had been fully convinced that Aunt Ludovika had made this visit

merely an excuse to settle the final arrangements about the disposition of her estate. She had settled them already in her own mind, and thought that, as Dietrich has just reached his twenty-fifth birthday, of course his aunt had only been awaiting his majority to make over the estate to him. But from to-night's occurrences it is very evident that she has no such idea. I do not know precisely how it came about, but, while they were all sitting in my parlor, Dietrich picked up a paper that was lying on the table and began to read aloud the political news. Joachim, becoming very tired of this, snatched the paper from his brother's hand, and, always ready for mischief, commenced to entertain us with the advertisements, —everything,—births and marriages, “matrimonials” and “personals,” in the most extraordinary jumble, mingled with recommendations of various articles of fashion or utility, delicacies of all descriptions, and numberless notices of bankruptcy and of sales of family estates. It was now Dietrich's turn to take the paper from his brother. He did so, angrily.

“Don't jest at the misfortunes of our class,” he said, indignantly. “I hate to see the old estates passing into ignoble hands, as though they were mere pieces of goods.”

You know how fully I agree with Dietrich on this point. With its estates the aristocracy gives up its firmest hold on existence. The chink of gold almost drowns the poesy of family traditions. The spend-thrift descendant squanders the possessions of his fathers, and then sells holy recollections to the high-

est bidder. Many others are driven by necessity into trade; for, no matter how strongly the heart may cling to the beloved possessions in lack of established institutions, gold alone can preserve them, and that gold the poor owner does not possess.

"You approve of the right of primogeniture?" said the President.

"Certainly I do," I replied. "Scorned, hated, and despised are the parvenus who deck themselves in borrowed plumes. But why are they permitted to assume them? Those who willingly supply them should be prevented; those who are compelled to do so should be aided. If only this right of primogeniture were secured, industry and trade might safely be encouraged; they would grow up to be supporters and aids to the aristocracy, and not to overstep and smother it. Then the two mighty pillars would prove worthy and beautiful columns for the state."

"And far firmer than if either had been raised on the ruins of the other," said the President.

"Yes," I answered; "for in such buildings rats and mice have full play, and among the ruins of a decaying aristocracy rises the universally and justly despised race of parvenus."

In the eagerness of discussion I had not remarked several warning coughs from Frau von Löben, nor Aunt Ludovika's embarrassed expression, till my ideas were brightened by Frau von Löben treading so violently on my foot under the table that I could not repress a shriek of dismay. Frau von Löben was more startled at my cry than I had been at the sudden

attack on my foot, and she shrieked even more loudly than I had done. The poor aunt, amazed at all this uproar, sprang to her feet and echoed the cry, to the indescribable delight of Arthur and Clärchen. All this was the work of a moment. General laughter followed.

"My sister-in-law is a manufacturer's daughter," whispered Frau von Löben to me.

"You maltreated me for nothing," I whispered, in return; "for she's far too sensible to feel hurt."

I was right. Aunt Ludovika's confusion arose from a totally different cause, as soon appeared.

"I have been intending to tell you ever since I came," she began, hesitatingly. "I was sure you would advise me to do it; but now I see that you think differently, and I'm afraid you will blame me. Well, honesty is the best policy." And, endeavoring to shake off her embarrassment, she continued, "I've sold my estate."

I felt heartily sorry for poor Frau von Löben. She turned first white and then crimson, and I don't know what she might not have said in her excitement and surprise, had not the President spoken.

"And why not, dear Ludovika?" he said, gently. "Our conversation just now was only an expression of our wishes and opinions, which we, of course, don't expect others to conform to; and, even if you thought as we do, your estate is not an inheritance from your own family, nor have you an heir to whom to secure it."

"Not in a direct line, that is," Frau von Löben could not help saying.

"That you should have done so without stringent

reasons is a different matter," continued the President, with a reproving glance at his wife. "These universal institutions are a great blessing to some, and to others a heavy burden. It is hard to decide whether the burden or the blessing be the greater."

"I never thought of all that," said the aunt. "I had a great deal of trouble with the place, and no peace of my life; and so I sold it off as soon as I could do so to advantage."

"From your stand-point, you acted perfectly right," said the President, consolingly.

"I thought your husband had a right to dispose of it?" said Frau von Löben, in spite of the President's warning look.

"He had none; the estate was mine," replied Aunt Ludovika, briefly.

Frau von Löben could not yet be stilled.

"Perhaps he expressed some wish concerning it; the wishes of the dead should always be respected."

"They are usually uttered under peculiar circumstances, and, of course, alter with those circumstances. They then meet with only a conditional fulfilment."

An angry reply rose to the lips of the bitterly-disappointed woman; but, fortunately, the President at that instant rose and looked at his watch, and we separated. The President has wonderful self-control. The foolish behavior of his wife must have mortified him much, and the crimson spots on his cheeks burned deeply; but no one would have discovered his disturbance from his manner, and we all parted apparently in the best of spirits.

SEVENTEENTH LETTER.

THE aunt has gone, and with her the President, who, in compliance with her entreaties and those of the whole family, accompanied his sister-in-law to consult the physician who afforded her so much relief. The latter is to decide what watering-place the patient is to visit, or what other means he had better adopt for his restoration. Aunt Ludovika is almost as sanguine on this subject as Frau von Löben is on every subject. She tells with the most extreme faith of the wonderful cures performed by this physician. Where all others failed, he succeeded. Many more such men, and there would be no sick people left. At least so she seems to believe, so great is her enthusiasm for him. Frau von Löben already beholds in imagination her husband restored to her in all the bloom of youth. I only hope that her anticipations may be realized far enough for him to last a few years longer, and that time may be given her to grow accustomed to the idea of parting from him. Dreadful as is this hesitation between hope and fear, I trust it may prove a means of breaking to her the still more dreadful certainty. An expected evil draws us to God, to plead that it may be averted, and brings us nearer to the only real source of comfort than when an unforeseen sorrow, striking us unprepared,

drives us to temporary despair. I would do anything for the poor woman, and yet I know not what to do. I dare not rouse her from her security; for the slightest hint, even advice to be careful of her husband's health, causes her such distress that I do not venture to give it. What will become of her when she learns the truth? It seems almost strange that beings whom a breath can overthrow should be sent into a world of storms; why such creatures as she, whose element is sunshine, and who are only capable of pleasure and enjoyment, should not have been created butterflies or flowers, embodiments of beauty and light-heartedness, instead of human beings. An immortal requires such different powers! It is true, these are not entirely denied to any, and the weakest can be strong in the panoply of humble, firm faith in God. Such a hope is like the sunlight,—not to be entirely obscured even in the darkest days; any other is only a flashing meteor.

Every dream founded on Aunt Ludovika is now over and gone. I told you of her singular manner, which I ascribed to a want of *savoir-vivre*, or to embarrassment. The mystery is now explained. She has not only sold her estate, but given away herself, and that secret has lain heavy on her heart during the whole visit. I told you that she desired to pass her last evening at home, and was kind enough to insist on my joining the family. Our circle for most of the evening was very small. Bertha had to go to a rehearsal of the French play in which she is to act, and, as Frau von Löben did not wish to leave

Aunt Ludovika, Dietrich accompanied her. Joachim never comes now before tea-time. Ambition seems one of his prominent qualities. He made up his mind long ago to pass his examination, which he was anticipating when I first met him, in the course of his seventeenth year. That was last fall; and now he is working with double diligence to make up for neglected opportunities, for he acknowledges that he threw away much time during this past winter. He has fixed hours for study, and never allows anything to interfere with them. He confessed to me, with childish *naïveté*, that he was wild sometimes to break loose.

“But my father,” he said, with deep feeling, “looks so ill, and so sad, that I should be a villain to give him pain; and, besides, I must be something before the others, because—you know——”

And he looked at me significantly. He referred to his debt. I leave this chain, which he himself forged, upon him, but in all else help him to freedom.

We old people, or older people, were sitting around the table. Gertrude was in the next room, busy as usual, and the little ones were with her at play, for the President cannot bear any noise. I think the poor man is failing faster than ever, from his very efforts to conceal his state. He was so ill this evening that he had to resign his usual dissimulation, but ascribed his indisposition to a heavy cold.

“You must drink elder-flower tea, and then you will soon be better,” said his wife.

“You will soon be better, if you will consult

my——” said Aunt Ludovika, and suddenly stopped, but, covering the pause with a cough, continued, with crimson cheeks, “my doctor; he worked wonders with me.”

The President smiled; and, with something of his old playful manner, the disappearance of which his wife has so often lamented, he said,—

“Ludovika, I believe he cured something else besides your liver.”

The little woman turned almost purple; she twisted her feet about, rubbed her hands, and at last threw her arms around the President, and said, in the greatest confusion,—

“How did you know I was engaged? Did you guess it, or did somebody tell you?”

“I guessed it,” answered the President, smiling.

Frau von Löben and I looked at each other in complete stupefaction. Her arms still around the President, Aunt Ludovika continued,—

“Hopeless and life-weary I went to him, and he gave me back health and happiness. What are millions without health? I conceived the greatest respect for his talent and for himself. He gave me renewed strength; he made me a new creature. I was trying to think how I could prove my gratitude, when he told me what he wished for,—the life that he had saved! It is very hard to decide on marrying again,” she added, beginning once more to rub her hands confusedly. The President came to her relief by congratulating her heartily, and uttered not a word of the blame which she evidently expected and feared.

"You don't blame me, then, for selling Löbenau, nor for marrying a *bourgeois*?" she asked.

"You are perfectly free, and need only think whether you love him and he be worthy of you," he answered.

"I regarded myself as a dying woman," said Aunt Ludovika, in a confused but pointed manner, "and actually made my will. But I have destroyed it."

"Of course," said the President. "Circumstances alter cases."

"My husband will naturally be my heir," she stammered, and then laughed, as the President, trying to relieve her kind-hearted scruples, asked, jestingly,—

"Are you apologizing for getting married instead of dying? It is nobody's business but your own."

"That is very true," she answered. "I go away much happier than I came; for I see that you—that you——" and she stopped short.

"That we have sufficient?" said the President. "Set your mind at rest about that."

The good aunt's explanations did not, perhaps, display any great amount of tact; but they showed such an amiable disposition, such regard for her relations, that it was impossible to object to the style in which she expressed them. In fact, she acted precisely as though she considered it her duty to have died, so as to prevent her first husband's family from losing the inheritance, and as though she were ashamed of not having done so.

To Frau von Löben's credit, I must say that, when forced to confront the *fait accompli* of the engage-

ment, she showed herself kind and sympathetic, and even the lost hope of the estate was forgotten in the brighter one of her husband's recovery. In her joyful anticipations she betrayed that, perhaps unconsciously to herself, there was more fear in her heart than I ever had suspected. Perhaps she does not choose to acknowledge her anxiety, perhaps she blinds herself to the danger; for she has not that force of character which, although perfectly conscious of any approaching evil, yet forces it into the background, in order to concentrate every power on the necessities of the moment. She will blind herself by false hopes and by frivolity until the blow falls; and a heavy blow it will be; for, though her love is a foolish, an unreasoning one, unable to see the requirements of duty, yet, as a mere feeling, it is there, and is strong enough to bear the weak woman to the earth. I am awaiting the President's return most eagerly, and will not send this letter until I can tell you the result of the consultation. That reminds me. Is there any Count Düsterloh besides yourself? and, if so, do you know him? Aunt Ludovika spoke of him as the purchaser of her estate; an agent arranged the matter, so she could not tell me anything of him, and, consequently, I am unable to give you any description of his appearance.

Later.—The President has returned. I have not seen him yet, but believe that the physician gave him considerable encouragement; he is not to go to any watering-place,—that is absolutely forbidden,—

but is to ask a longer leave of absence, and try a visit to the country. Frau von Löben is disappointed at this, but much delighted at the decision of the famous doctor, who, it appears, declared any other treatment useless. She came at once to tell me the good news, and I congratulated her with all my heart. My congratulations must have been very earnest; for she asked, suddenly,—

“Were you, then, uneasy,—I mean really uneasy?”

She seemed so agitated by the mere thought that I had not the courage fully to confess *how* much so I had been.

Later.—I was interrupted in my letter by a visit from the President himself. Oh, what sad news I have to tell you! As I expressed my pleasure at the good report I had just heard, a strange smile, that at once destroyed every vestige of hope, appeared on his worn face.

“I was compelled solemnly to promise my wife that I would repeat to her, word for word, the physician’s opinion,” he began. “I told him this, and that for myself I desired to hear only the truth; that, as a Christian, I did not fear death,—as a man, trembled only on account of my family,—and that I was unwilling to waste the time that remained to me in doubt, the cruelest enemy of all strength, mental or physical. He examined me thoroughly, and told me that anything but rest would be perfectly useless. I repeated these words to my wife,”—he smiled sadly,—“but I said nothing of their meaning. I could not bear to speak the death-sentence.”

I could not answer him, only clasped my hands silently.

"I speak openly with you," he continued, "because I need some one to assist me in the work of love which must occupy my last remaining days, and because I hope to secure a friend to my bereaved ones, who will give them affection, help, and advice, when I am no more."

I held out my hand. He grasped it, and then continued,—

"You will aid me in hiding the danger from my wife as long as possible? I may be wrong in doing so; but I confess that her grief would make a coward of me, and her violent despair would embitter my parting hours, as well as hasten them. She is utterly without self-control in any emergency, and passionate in the expression of all her feelings; but I hope that, when she is brought face to face with the stern, the unavoidable fact that we are parted forever, God will give her the strength which she lacks so much, and which no other can give her!"

It was no time to moralize or regret, nor to mourn over neglect which now, in the eleventh hour, was to be made good. The dying man might have asked what he chose; I could have refused him nothing.

"Your wife is naturally sanguine," I said, "and I will do my best to hide the truth from her."

"And afterwards?" he asked. "You will be a friend to my dear ones?"

"Most certainly."

"You are a reasonable woman, and know more

about the requirements of life than my wife does. You will advise her, guide her, and smooth her way a little; for I—alas! I have always carried her over all the rough spots in her married life.”

Had he only not done so!

“I leave no debts,” he continued, “except the amount stolen from us. Of that I have paid a considerable portion, and hope to pay the rest; if any balance remain, it must be made up by a sale of our superfluous furniture. If you can, do persuade my wife to move to a cheaper and less fashionable locality; for while here the demands on her purse will be unceasing, and for the rest of her life she will be compelled to practice extreme economy. It is the hardest thing in the world to cut the coat according to the cloth; and in every class of society, though of course there are exceptions, you will find that the majority live beyond their incomes.”

“And do you imagine that in a smaller town the style of life would be simpler?” I asked. “That has not been my experience.”

“Probably you are right,” he answered; “but in a smaller town all this folly may come cheaper, and, at all events, there will be less competition. My wife will have but a small pension. I will not anticipate her future life. Mortals are short-sighted, and I might unconsciously bind her to a course of action which would prove not for the best. So what I say to you is to be considered merely as an expression of my wishes, and as an assistance to you in any difficulty. I have no intention of binding you to comply with it.”

I nodded, as a sign that I understood him; for my heart was too full to speak.

"You will be a true friend to my sons and daughters, especially to my Bertha, whose path in this life promises to be a hard one,—perhaps the most so of my children?"

"God will care for her, and I will too," was all that I could say.

"Dietrich will see now how foolish he was to give up his agricultural prospects. I hope, as it is not yet too late, he will perceive the necessity and resign. If not, it is his own affair; he can manage to get along in his profession, but he will then be unable to do anything for his brothers and sisters. Urge this upon him after my death. About George I have already written to the king, begging that he may be allowed to finish his education in the corps of cadets. To pay for it would draw heavily on my wife's small means. The letter is in my desk; I depend on your forwarding it."

He spoke these sentences without waiting for a reply. He knew that he could count on me to carry out this his last will and testament, written not on dead paper, but deeply imprinted on my heart, and I vowed, in secret, faithfully to acquit myself of the trust.

"About Joachim I say nothing," he continued; "but there is something about the boy that makes me feel that he will fight his own way. Let him do so bravely. That strife injures far less than the idleness or cowardice which would shun the struggle."

Gertrude is a dutiful child, and is utterly unselfish, —two qualities worth far more than the fairy gift of beauty. The little ones,”—and his voice failed him, —“God help them! and the others, too!”

“The little ones shall be my children,” I said, prompted by an irresistible impulse. I shall never forget his look of thanks; his whole face seemed transfigured, but it was only for an instant; then the sad, melancholy expression returned.

“I thank you,” he said, “but I take your words only as expressing your kindly feeling, and do not bind you to anything. I came to you because I need your help and feel how useful it will be to me; for you have just the qualities that are lacking in my wife,—practical common sense, a clear judgment not easily deceived, and self-discipline. The love which strives for mutual strengthening and improvement is far better than that which unreasoningly lifts every burden from the shoulders of the beloved, leaving them, when the parting hour has come, utterly without power of endurance and comfortless indeed. I now have told you all that weighs on me. Perhaps you are surprised at this urgent and sudden confidence; ascribe its suddenness to your own sensible, penetrating character; and its urgency—ascribe it to nothing,—only forgive me for it.”

“On the contrary, I thank you with all my heart.”

“I could have appealed to my sister-in-law,” he continued, with the frankness which the situation required; “but I was hindered partly by her new relations, but principally by her pecuniary circum-

stances. She would have supposed these requests to have some bearing on them, and would no doubt do all that I asked, and more; but that is not what I desire. I am a petitioner,—no beggar.”

“I understand you perfectly,” I said, startled by the word and by the tone in which he said it. “I promise to be a faithful friend to your wife and children, in the fullest sense of the word; but no more and no less.”

He pressed my hand, raised it to his burning lips, and left the room; and I, like a true woman, sat down and wept with all my heart. You know how earnestly I will strive to keep the promise I have made; and meantime I longed to give my poor friend one last joyful surprise. You are aware on what friendly terms I am with Dietrich, and how plainly he talks to me of his affairs. It was, consequently, not difficult for me to urge upon him, as if by accident, the prudence of resigning, even now, and returning to his former plans. I told him how much sooner he would be in an independent position and able to be of assistance to his family, and that it would take a weight from his father’s heart.

“If I could, I would be only too glad to do so; but it is impossible,” he answered.

“Because you don’t choose——”

“Because I cannot.”

“And why?”

He hesitated, and then exclaimed,—

“Because of my debts! I should be imprisoned immediately on my resignation; my uniform is my

sole protection. Well, what is done, is done! There is no help for it."

"But your whole future hangs upon this. Every nerve should be strained to extricate you."

"Not by you!" he exclaimed, grasping both my hands. "I beg of you not to speak of such a thing. I will receive nothing from your hands! The chains are on my feet, and I must bear them until some means of release present itself. When my father recovers, I will talk over my affairs with him, and we will arrange them together. It is not easy for a lieutenant in difficulties to borrow so large a sum as I require. You would be frightened if I told you *how* large. My father would lend it to me, I would undertake the interest, and would resign and go to the country. That is the decision I have come to, and it is the best thing to do."

Poor fellow! it will be long ere he is released from his chains, and they will ring a sad accompaniment to the funeral hymn.

EIGHTEENTH LETTER.

LIFE seems to me now more like a dreadful dream than a reality. The strange contrasts before my eyes make the sad circumstances all the sadder. Here, that dying life on which depends all the happiness as well as the worldly prosperity of a whole family; and there, that family, unconscious of the menacing cloud that hangs over them, basking in an artificial light of worldliness and folly. Here, the failing body of the Christian man from whose spirit all earthliness seems disappearing day by day, awaiting, with the calm of an already glorified spirit, the end of all his sufferings, only desiring to pass the last days of his pilgrimage in peace and to depart without beholding the agony of his beloved ones; there, those beloved ones, deceived by the courage of the invalid and full of delusive hopes, borne along on the rapid tide of fashion and dissipation, and absorbed in the most trivial, the narrowest, interests. I see the waves sparkling and rippling around the paradise of guileless childhood, and I see them bearing the bark which newly-awakened energy and sense of duty are driving steadily onward; but how soon will the waters become troubled! how soon will the little boat lie stranded on the beach! What long and bitter effort it will take ere it can be fairly launched

again for the long, laborious voyage of life! I cannot forget these things. They are ceaselessly before my mind. How discordantly chimes the tocsin of pleasure with the faintly-echoing passing bell! My heart swells high with indignation, as I listen to the inharmonious tones, till anger is lost in sorrow for those to whose ears they have become familiar sounds.

Can you think of death in connection with carnival gayeties, and, remembering the President's late conversation with me, turn at once to the preparations for the long-talked-of French comedy, in which Frau von Löben's and Bertha's every thought is just now absorbed? Although the leave of absence has been received, the family cannot quit the town on account of this comedy. There are a thousand different things to be thought of,—everything except the most important of all. It would be impossible for Bertha to withdraw, lest she should cause inconvenience to some of those who have undertaken to get up the play, and, by causing a postponement, injure the object of the performance, besides the disappointment to her new friend, who cannot exist without Bertha, and who has given the young girl pleasures which her parents never could have procured for her. In short, it is the way of the world,—home regarded last and least of all, and the old-fashioned notions, which considered it the centre of enjoyment, totally abjured and forgotten. There stand the mother and children gazing on the rolling wheel of Fortune, while close beside them a heart is breaking, and fading eyes, from which the scales have fallen too late, are

closing for ever and ever. It seems to me cruel kindness to leave the family in their error. They will reproach themselves bitterly, when all is over, for not having made better use of the father's last hours, for not having treasured them up as consolation and comfort for the long, lonely future. How must the President feel when he hears the solemn councils that are held over colors and costume, and the impatient longings for the expected day! I think it all must seem to his ears like the rushing wind, in which each one hears, according to his humor, words and sounds of different signification.

Perhaps it is merely my anxiety, but it seems to me that the President is much more feeble, although he does not complain, and, it may be, does not think the end so near as it seems to me to be. He is even making plans for next winter; but the brown leaves of autumn will be a warm covering on his grave. Fall and spring, the death and the resurrection times of nature, usually bring the summons to sufferers of his description. I cannot help thinking of what Dietrich said to me,—that cessation from exertion would be his death-warrant, for then the disease would make unresisted headway. I fear it is true that, as the victim ceases to struggle, the enemy presses hard upon him, and he feels thoroughly, for the first time, his own weakness.

I must tell you something so singular,—such a strange illusion of the senses: I saw on the street, not long since, either your old steward and major-domo, or else his ghost. I was driving; he was

walking. I thought I would have known him among a thousand,—the same dignified, ruddy face, the same white hair, the same walk, the same expression. I bent from the window and called to him, but my voice was drowned in the rolling of the wheels. I told the driver to turn and follow the man; but, before I could make him understand, he was around the corner. I drove after him, but he had disappeared. The astonished face of the driver warned me to calm my excitement. Of course I know how fully your old steward is in your confidence; but what business could he have here? and, besides, you certainly would have sent some message to me by him. But still I could not convince myself that it was not my old acquaintance, and was much excited over this little incident, and great homesickness was the consequence. But I shall not see you till the fall. I did not intend to pass the summer in town, but now I have determined so to do. I have been led to this resolution partly by my own feelings, which make me unwilling to desert my friends at this juncture, and partly by a duty which I have undertaken. The Löbens have rented a country-seat about four miles from town; this is too far for Gertrude to come in to school every day, and yet it seemed a pity that she should lose so much time. It was proposed that she should be sent to boarding-school until the holidays. The poor little thing's eyes filled with tears, and she winked them very suspiciously, but bravely swallowed her sobs as her father said,—

"I shall miss you most of all, my child; so you must make it as easy for me as you can."

The child smiled an assent, though she evidently did not trust herself to speak. My decision was quickly taken. As I did not choose to go away, I would be glad to have a companion for my loneliness. I begged that Gertrude might be confided to my care. It was no sacrifice; but, had it been so, the delight of the child would have more than compensated me for it. She asked a thousand questions. Would she really stay with me? Would she sleep in my room? To everything I answered, "Yes." I have taken a weight from the President's mind, and his gratitude is touching. They leave next week. What a pleasant time I will have with my little guest! Joachim also is to take his meals with me; and Dietrich,—you know what good friends he and I are. My family has suddenly grown quite large, has it not? I shall feel lonely when I part with my little *protégée*. A solitary life does not suit me. I am not fitted for it.

NINETEENTH LETTER.

THE catastrophe is rapidly approaching; the thunder-cloud is close at hand, and soon it will wrap in gloom those now absorbed in selfish pleasure. The President has for the last few days been in a state of feverish restlessness. He *must* go; the city air is stifling him, he says. He even went so far as to declare that there was an oppression on his heart which only country air could relieve.

"Don't be a fool, man!" said old Frau von Schöнау. "Why do you wait for this ridiculous play? Let Bertha stay with me, if her heart is so set on it; and I will bring her to you when the absurd affair is over."

The President silenced her with a look.

"My old asthma, that is all," he said to his wife, with a smile; "but it does oppress me greatly, and the fresh air will perhaps relieve me."

"Have patience for only two days longer," said his wife, coaxingly. "Day after to-morrow is the representation, and it would be impossible for me to go through the trouble of moving before that is over."

He yielded, with a little sigh.

Bertha has just left me. With white cheeks she asked "if her father were really dangerously ill."

"Why do you ask, dear child?" I said.

"I don't know," she said; "but I think we must all be blind or crazy, or else we deceive each other and ourselves. Mother seems not in the least uneasy, and my brothers do not choose, probably, to speak of it; or perhaps it is because we are so accustomed to seeing my father that we do not appreciate how ill he is. As for myself, I have been thinking of nothing but the comedy; Heaven forgive me! But Aunt Schöнау just now said to me, 'Staying here for this silly comedy is a theft from your father's life.' I was very angry at first; for I thought, 'Here is another person who grudges me a little pleasure!' But she said, 'Look at your father once with your heart, and not with your blinded eyes,'"—here Bertha crimsoned painfully,—"'and then be as much vexed with me as you choose; but do not make a scene, or you will prepare for yourself a bitterer draught of remorseful recollections than even your selfishness about the comedy will one day give you.'"

So the old lady could hold her peace no longer! I know that for a long time she has been prepared for the worst; and she has been urgent with me to speak to the children on the subject. The sons I felt sure knew the truth,—partly, at all events,—and as for Bertha, I did not venture to undeceive *her*, fearing lest I should call up stormy spirits in attempting to do so, and doubting my power to exorcise them, should such prove to be the case. Besides, I remembered the President's express wishes not to be tortured by a sight of the agony of grief that would

inevitably follow a right knowledge of his condition. Bertha continued,—

“So I went to my father’s room. He had fallen asleep in his arm-chair. There was no light; but the moonbeams fell on his face, and he looked so terribly pale that I thought he was dead already.”

The girl was in such extreme excitement that it infected me, and I thought for the moment that she was the bearer of the fatal news.

“He opened his eyes and smiled when I came nearer,” she continued. “Don’t you remember how unstrung and irritable he was not long ago, and how my mother complained of the change in his character? Now he is always smiling,—and such a heavenly smile! He is desperately ill, is he not?” she added.

I did my best to console her.

“If your father *be* so ill,” I said, “the sight of your grief would only make him worse. You know that his whole life has been devoted to making his family happy, and it is likely that he conceals his sufferings so as to spare them pain. The nearer to the grave you think him, the more earnestly you should strive to remember all this.”

“Impossible!” she groaned, wringing her hands. “How can I seem happy?”

“Not happy, perhaps, but certainly composed; and, besides, he *is* very ill, it is true, but does it follow that there is no hope?”

“Yes,” she said, with great decision. “Now I see it all! Since his visit to that doctor he has been

so"—she was interrupted here by her sobs—"so angelic, so transfigured! He knows that he must die, though he conceals it from us."

"Trust in God!" I said. "Control yourself for *his* sake, and do not distress your mother."

"My poor mother!" she sighed.

"Besides," I continued, "the country may improve him; fresh air and rest often work wonders."

"And this last hope is being delayed through my means!" she cried. "I cannot, I will not act; I will go at once to Wanda and tell her so."

I detained her almost by force, and told her to remember the surprise her withdrawal would cause her father, and how difficult it would be to explain it to him without his perceiving her real reasons.

"Your sudden recognition of the situation really does exaggerate its hopelessness. Even in threatening illnesses the patient is not always in momentary danger. You are now thinking only of your personal feelings, which naturally revolt against this projected pleasure; but if you look upon it as an obligation you may see it your duty to act from regard to others. I, of course, do not advise your remaining an instant after the play. Perhaps you will now do for the sake of the worthy object, that which you undertook as a mere pleasure; it becomes a duty when it is done, in opposition to your own wishes, to spare your friends inconvenience and your family uneasiness. We will try to persuade your mother to move to-morrow, and thus you will be relieved of the responsibility of detaining your father even a day longer."

She shook her head.

"I cannot act," she said, "that is certain. But I will not inconvenience or distress any one; I will go at once to Wanda. She is not to play in the same piece, and knows my part perfectly, for she taught it to me, so she can take it; and if we persuade mamma to leave to-morrow, they need not know of my not acting. I will go to Wanda; do you go to my mother. If Heaven will only help me out of this comedy, I will never amuse myself again as long as I live! My poor, poor father!"

She fell weeping into my arms.

"Courage!" I said. "Compose yourself. He must know nothing of your anxiety. Control yourself for his sake."

She promised everything, and hurried away. I went to Frau von Löben. The good woman seems utterly unable to guess or anticipate any wish of her suffering husband. As soon as she understands that he has a desire which he will not express out of regard to her wishes, she never thinks for an instant of insisting on having her own way. She has only the thoughtless egotism of a spoiled child, not a cold, calculating, selfish nature. It was not at all difficult, without awaking any special uneasiness, to persuade her that she would gratify her husband deeply by hastening her departure.

"If I were only certain about it. I must ask him."

"He will say no, so as to spare you trouble; besides, it is much pleasanter to have one's wishes forestalled than to be obliged always to express them."

"That is true. But Bertha?——"

"She can stay with me, and I will bring her out to you after the comedy."

"Charming! But the packing up?"

"Caroline and I will both help you. Just go and ask your husband how he would like to start to-morrow morning."

She went, and returned at once.

"He is delighted; he was anxious to do so," said she. "How strange that he said nothing about it! How could I guess he wanted to go?"

While we were in the depths of packing, Bertha returned, quite heated.

"We have had such a quarrel," she whispered to me. "But it is all right; she is going to take my *rôle*. She wouldn't have done it if it had not been for the becoming costume."

She spoke so bitterly that I looked up in surprise.

"She says so herself; she is as full of fun and as gay as ever, and wanted to laugh away my fears."

"Bertha," I said, "all the world is not alike."

"She wanted to insist on my playing; but, if it be frivolous to overlook a fatal danger, it is criminal to jest at it," she continued.

She was much excited. Her enthusiasm for her friend has received its first check. She had gone to her for help, and had not found the sympathy which had been always ready when the two young heads built rosy castles in the air together. Her heart was full of distress, and Wanda had shown barely even superficial sympathy. To be a friend in sorrow

as in joy, that is the secret of true affection. Otherwise it is but a feeble band, which the first strain will part, the first tears dissolve. I could not speak further with Bertha at that moment. I begged her assistance in packing, and kept her busy for some time. That did her good. Everything is ready, and the carriage is ordered for twelve o'clock to-morrow.

I have employed the twilight hour in writing to you, and must now return to the Löbens. Dietrich and Joachim have come. I hear their footsteps. I know this sudden decision will delight them. To-morrow I will close my letter.

—How short a time since last night! How much shorter the one moment that brought sorrow and dismay to so many hearts! The President is dead. In the midst of his family, just as his wife was indulging in the most brilliant anticipations of their trip to the country, and of the great benefit her husband would derive from it, the death-angel came from the unknown land, and, after a short struggle, bore away his victim. While Frau von Löben was still speaking, he sprang to his feet suddenly.

“Too late!”

The words burst from his half-choked breast, and a dark stream of blood followed; in a few moments he was dead. Ah, that long restlessness! that thirst for fresh air! The effect of his death is indescribable. Every shade of agony,—the mad outbreak of temporarily shaken reason, tears, moans, silent resignation,—all held watch by the quiet couch that night. The young men are models. Bertha seems completely

stunned. Gertrude weeps quietly. The little ones, who, I am thankful to say, were not present at the frightful scene, are more frightened and troubled by the sorrow all around them than by its cause, which they scarcely understand. I keep them as much out of the way as possible. As for Frau von Löben, I can only pray that Heaven will pardon her distracted words and help and forgive the poor, weak, broken heart. She is sleeping now, half from an anodyne, half from physical and mental exhaustion. I take this moment to finish my letter; I will write again ere long.

TWENTIETH LETTER.

DREADFUL days are these,—long and dreadful. Frau von Löben's agony amounts to absolute blasphemy. She accuses God and man, and asks, over and over, "Why should this blow have fallen upon *me*,—upon *me*?" The saddest question that an aching heart can ask. If she only could decide to look once more upon that quiet face, she would gain what she needs; but she shudders at the thought, and trembles like a child at the mere suggestion. Her whole mind seems in confusion; at one moment she is full of wild lamentations, then of despairing dread of life, as she reckons up its most trifling cares. Every effort at self-control is rejected as an impossibility; all attempts at comfort are in vain; the touching affection of her children, my arguments, and Aunt Schöнау's advice and encouragement, are all of no avail.

The old lady is a pattern. If I did not love her already, she would now win my whole heart by her sound, hearty sympathy, her patience, and the true consolation she offers, drawn from the inexhaustible source of sincere religion. But nothing has any effect upon the poor, afflicted woman. Dietrich has undertaken all the business matters, and we talk over plans and prospects together; but she only

listens to us with a half-comprehending gaze, and shakes her head at every proposition.

Alas, that such afflictions should awake other than the better feelings of human nature, sympathy and kindly consideration! They call up, also, many egotistical traits, which strike heavily on the hearts of the bereaved. I could not but think of this when looking at the shower of large and small accounts that had poured in upon the family with indecent haste, showing that their senders remembered not only the indebtedness, but also that a change of fortune is apt to follow the decease of the head of a family. Most of these debts had been incurred by Frau von Löben, generally for goods purchased some time since, and only increased her distress of mind. In vain has Dietrich taken care that no more such documents reach her eyes; her anxiety is not mitigated. As long as her husband lived, she never troubled herself about outstanding accounts. If a bill was presented, and she had the money, she paid it; if not, the President did so at the end of the year. In proportion to her former disregard of unpaid bills is now her terror of them, so much does her racked, confused mind exaggerate their possible consequences. She sees herself in a debtor's prison, or reduced to beggary. I have never beheld such a morbid dread of poverty; and even retrenchment seems such to her. I feel the deepest pity for her, none the less for being compelled to repress every sign of impatience with this want of reason and self-control. The good President did her an irreparable injury when he, as he himself said,

“carried her over the rough places in his arms;” for now her feet totter and tremble, and she fancies abysses on every hand. The President’s papers are in perfect order, and there is sufficient money on hand to pay the funeral expenses and the most pressing claims. If a smaller residence be taken, and the superfluous furniture sold, there will be enough for her to get along for a time, and it is probable that the king will allow her a pension in addition to the usual one. In vain does Dietrich, with touching patience, repeat all this to her again and again. She only wrings her hands, and will not be convinced that she and her family are not reduced to actual beggary. I really fear for her reason, if this continue. What avail is all that confidence in the “good Father,” with which, in her happy days, she referred to his loving care and omniscience the most trivial matters, if she now, in her dark hour, doubt his justice, goodness, aid, and protection? To-day she asked Dietrich, with the greatest bitterness, if she could not petition the king to do something for her children, as she had no means of bringing them up according to their station, and could not Arthur learn some trade? If she wrote to him herself, he never could be cruel enough to refuse her.

“Mother,” answered Dietrich, gently, “the little ones, thank Heaven, are not orphans; they still have——”

“It would be better for them if they had not me,” she interrupted, gloomily. “I am nothing, without their father. I cannot think or act alone, and will

only be a burden upon you ; you will curse me. If it were not for me——”

In this circle all her ideas run. It is a difficult task always to oppose to these outbursts of unreasoning suffering the same calm, unchanging patience. The two little children I keep away as much as possible. Gertrude, who, of course, is not now going to school, takes care of them. Bertha keeps entirely to herself. I see after the household affairs. Numberless visits of condolence are paid,—a shocking custom, that seems to make a house of mourning public property ; for such visits are made just as often out of curiosity or etiquette as from sympathy and kindly feeling. Frau von Schöнау is here almost all the time, but I see and hear nothing of Countess Wanda. I suppose she is busy with the French comedy, as she has Bertha's *rôle* to fill, as well as her own. Now I have given you some idea of my position, and that of the bereaved family.

TWENTY-FIRST LETTER.

WE have had a sad day. The earth lies over the dead. An almost endless train of friends and relations followed him to the grave. The cadet came home for the funeral. Sorrow has made him forget all his affectations. He is only a weeping, sobbing child. The interment was in the morning, and in the afternoon we all went to the churchyard to cover the new-made grave with flowers. From that time dates a change in Frau von Löben's state of mind. The loud sorrow, the lamentations,—I had almost said the blasphemies,—are hushed. She is calm, and always appears sunk in deep thought. We remained together all the evening; and, when we parted, Dietrich and Joachim accompanied me to my rooms.

“We want to talk over our plans with you,” said Dietrich, “for of course we cannot remain as we are. We must both choose some other career.”

And now they explained to me their intentions. Dietrich, who cannot leave the army on account of his debts without being involved in numberless embarrassments, is going to request to be transferred to the Infantry, resigning to Joachim the three hundred thalers already spoken of, and he, after his examination, will enter upon agricultural pursuits in the place

of his elder brother. The tears started to my eyes as Dietrich spoke.

"You poor children!" I could not help exclaiming. "Can nothing else be done?" I saw how it hurt Joachim to resign the prospect of the gay student days, and his pet dream,—a diplomatic career; but he swallowed his tears bravely, and said,—

"We can't ride our hobbies any longer, but I shall trot along through the world well enough on my plough-horse. Dietrich has resigned the three hundred thalers a year to me, and that will be another reason for me to struggle on as fast as possible, for the poor fellow can ill do without them."

Dietrich sprang to his feet and walked quickly up and down the room.

"This is all my fault," he sighed. "If I were not in debt, everything could be arranged so much better. I would resign and turn farmer. I know enough already to fill the place of under-inspector. I could get along on the smallest possible salary, and then Joachim could study on my allowance. We could easily arrange it all; but now I have fettered myself, and the penalty of my guilt falls upon us both."

"And what is to be done about your debts, even as it is?" I asked.

"I shall be compelled to seek some accommodation with my creditors, and then try to pay them by monthly installments."

"But," I exclaimed, in surprise, "I thought an officer could not get along without money! How, then, will you manage to pay these debts?"

“In the Infantry, in the smaller garrison, I shall be able to manage ; and if I can get along till Joachim has finished his education and can earn something for himself, then he will help me. We will have to bear each other’s burdens for some time to come.”

“Poor children !” I thought to myself, “how suddenly are your bright gay wings clipped ! Perhaps it is for the best. We are not made to fly, and even walking is often a hard, hard task.”

“Heaven help you, and grant that you may remain true to your resolutions !” I said aloud.

“We promised each other, over our father’s death-bed, that we would be brave and honorable men,” said Joachim.

“Amen !” I added, and I trust in my young friends and believe that they will keep their promise. It costs a hard struggle when deeds have to take the place of dreams, hopes, and wishes. But life was not given us to waste in such, and in deeds should we use, and show ourselves grateful for, God’s gift of time. The President was painfully deficient in energy, and now at his grave the two sons undertake to supply the deficiency. A bitterly-taught lesson they have had. But never would they have grasped the standard, and pressed forward, knighted by their own hands, had not death consecrated them for battle and, I hope, for victory.

I am writing by Frau von Löben’s bedside, where I have been watching her slumbers. We have a thousand daily examples of God’s goodness and wisdom, and deny and disbelieve them a thousand times ;

but the tender message of his compassion brought to us by the gentle sleep-angel falls soothingly on every aching heart. Life is such a long, rugged, wearisome road,—what a blessing to be borne forward a little way unconsciously to ourselves! The deep darkness in which slumber wraps us is the brightest side of many a human life. I have sat by many sick-beds, but never with so heavy a heart as by this one, for here the soul as well as the body is ailing; to both beneficent slumber has brought a temporary respite. May it also bring strength to bear that which cannot be forgotten!

TWENTY-SECOND LETTER.

THE short calm is over; it was only a lull in the storm. Now the waves are swelling high once more, the clouds are piled in heavy masses, and renewed shipwreck threatens the unseaworthy vessel we have striven so hard to save. Frau von Löben's quiet was only exhaustion, not resignation. Now the old passionate grief has returned with double egotism, and makes her forget everything save her own sorrow and her own suffering. I am anxious and distressed about her, for there seems no place to cast anchor in the storm-shaken nature. She goes from one paroxysm into another, and yields herself up completely to the wildest despair. One moment it is utter recklessness, then weakness, then shrieks and cries for her husband, or moans for the lack of daily bread. I think that the depth of feelings should not always be judged by the violence with which they are expressed, for the soul grows strong in silence.

How is the weak body to bear the strain of thus dashing itself against the barriers of reason and necessity? Such violence is almost suicidal; for, although it may not kill the body, it destroys its likeness to the Creator, changing it from an object of beauty to one of terror; and when will her children lose the impression of these dreadful scenes? I never let the

little ones see their mother, and even Gertrude only in her quieter moments. The sight of her children seems to bring no comfort. They all appear to her thrust from their natural station in life and condemned to penury and obscurity. We dare not leave her alone for a moment. Dietrich and Joachim are with us just as much as possible, and they, Bertha, Frau von Schönau, and myself take by turns the sad duty of watcher, which keeps at least one of us always by her side. Caroline, my greatest assistant in the household affairs, also managed to gain admission to the sick-chamber; and, as she knows how to hide real respect under apparent freedom of manner, she succeeded in scattering some dewdrops of refreshment on this parched and thirsty soul. I heard her say something to Bertha not long since for which I really felt like kissing her. Bertha's grief sometimes finds vent in ill humor,—the most pitiful, unconsoling, and unfortunate vent that it can find. In one of these attacks she was most unjust to Caroline, and I heard the latter answer,—

“I cannot help it if you speak so to me. I am none the worse for it, and you are none the better. I am old, and you are young, but you are not exactly my mistress, so that I ought to hold my tongue; but Fräulein Hildegard always lets me talk, so I want to tell you something. Abuse me as much as you choose when you feel bad and you can't help yourself; but don't do it to other people. It is much worse to be ill-tempered than to be sad. Everybody's heart is open to sorrowful people, but shut up against ill-humored ones. No offense, Fräulein Bertha.”

I stepped quietly away, without awaiting the reply. Poor Bertha has many hard struggles before her. Wanda has deserted her in her need. Her sunny nature is not suited for the shadows cast by affliction. She has written two or three times to Bertha, who quietly handed me the notes. They were as sweet and as loving as possible; every third line was "my darling," and begged that she would forgive her for not coming herself, but she was so foolish, and afraid to come where a dead person had been, because she had a terror of ghosts; and, besides, she was so soft-hearted that it hurt her to see pain, but she loved her Bertha more than tongue could tell, and *she* must love *her*, and be happy for her sake. Then something about an anticipated trip to Paris together, as, of course, the President's death nullified his former objections, reminiscences of past enjoyment, prospects for the coming winter, but not the slightest comprehension of what comfort to offer a seared and bleeding heart. What a pity that the charming little creature has no more character! She seems to me a personification of the joys of this world. Dazzled senses, fleeting splendors, giddy enjoyment,—these she has to offer; but those who sink into her arms will feel no heart beating against theirs. Bertha has not answered any of the letters. I understand perfectly the feelings that restrain her from so doing. To give a heart to those who cannot value or comprehend it is to throw it under their feet; and who that understands this clearly would dare thus to trifle with God's precious gift? It is a hard lesson, but I expect that it

will yield good fruit. Such times of trial show who really are our friends; then they rise from the crowd of mere acquaintances, which are like the sand on the sea-shore in multitude. Even good will goes very far, and the satisfaction of knowing the true from the untrue is not too dearly bought with many sad disappointments.

TWENTY-THIRD LETTER.

My forebodings were just. Frau von Löben is very ill, and is raging in the delirium of brain-fever. It is only a continuation and exaggeration of her former paroxysms, and displays her broken spirit in the most distressing manner. She suffers terribly; and so do we. Only one ray of light gilds the gloom; but that, I hope, is the harbinger of a brighter dawn. Dietrich is now able to resign, and to undertake the calling to which he formerly thought of devoting himself, and which seems to offer him a happier future and the possibility of independence, and to Joachim the prospect of continuing his studies. Dietrich is like a released captive, and his joy is tempered and restrained only by anxiety about his mother.

Let me tell you how it was. A well-known banker here, who was a friend of the President's mother, came to the young man and offered to assist him if he had been placed in any pecuniary embarrassments by his father's death. He spoke in a jesting, good-humored way of the extravagance of young officers, and the impossibility of conforming expenses to incomes without a radical change in modern life and customs, and then suggested that possibly this incompatibility might be found in the affairs of the young man before him. He touched lightly on Dietrich's

good character, with considerable penetration drew the distinction between youthful extravagance and want of conscience, avowed himself a friend of youth, —above all, of young officers,—spoke of his connection with Dietrich's father and grandmother, and finally repeated his offer to assist him by word and deed. Dietrich, although astonished beyond measure, could not resist the kindly urgency of his unexpected benefactor. He told him his whole position; the banker promised to arrange matters for him, and to lend him the sum at the usual rate of interest. All this was done in the kindest and most delicate way, so that it was impossible to refuse or to be hurt. With all due respect to the kind-hearted banker, this assistance is perfectly providential, and is too thoroughly different from the usual ways of business-men not to make us suspect some other motive-power than mere friendship for the relations of his *protégé*. Dietrich thinks it must have been the kindness of his comrades, and recalls several similar instances of friendly fidelity and *esprit de corps*; and this makes him even sadder at the prospect of parting from his beloved comrades. But I, without doubting the fidelity, et cetera, think I see another hand behind the scenes, and, so thinking, venture to kiss it, in spirit, with hearty gratitude and affection.

TWENTY-FOURTH LETTER.

THE patient is no better. She has not a lucid moment. The doctor says, "Pray that she may die; for no human brain can bear such a fearful strain."

The strange contrasts in life! With Aunt Ludovika's letter of condolence for the death of her brother-in-law came the notice of her marriage. Madness and death are wrestling for the possession of this struggling soul, while the two guileless little children, to whom grief is only as a morning cloud, are changing into a harmless play the saddest scene in life, imitating, in their innocent way, a scene beheld by them lately for the first time,—a funeral!

TWENTY-FIFTH LETTER.

AFTER my last letter, you will not be surprised to hear of Frau von Löben's death. After a week of despair, and a week of delirium, she is released at last. Even her dying words presented the most extraordinary inconsistency. With a cry of satisfied yearning, she extended her arms to her husband, whom she saw in the messenger-angel; but a wandering thought strayed back to earth, and to the weeping Bertha she murmured,—

“Poor Bertha! Double mourning! All black! Patience,—next winter! Ah, who will introduce you into society now? Not I, poor child!”

I believe these words have torn away the last glittering veil from the tinsel images, the attainment of which the heart-broken girl once regarded as the goal of youthful effort and the height of youthful happiness.

LAST LETTER.

A SECOND grave rises beside the first, on which are still lying the faded flowers, the last offering of the dead to the dead. The grass-blades are springing on the twin hillocks; soon they will be green, and fresh life will spring from the lives that have sunk to rest. So do germs of hope sprout from the buried happiness of the sorrowing ones. Sorrowing are they still; but consolation has begun to dawn, and trustful childish eyes look up to me through their tears, and lighten all my future. My dear, kind friend, you know with what false ideas of selfish pleasure and freedom from care I left you,—you know it all. What I sought, I found not; such enjoyment is not what it is dreamed to be, and, even if vouchsafed to us, would prove far from a blessing; but what I needed I *have* found; and, though it has come to me through sadness, tears, and the graves of two friends, I take thankfully the gift that once more makes my life a life of duty. It seems to me a command from Heaven. Almost unconsciously I forged anew my broken fetters, and now I have chained them around me forever. It was all decided last evening.

The orphans and myself, returning from the churchyard, found Aunt Schönauf awaiting us.

"What is to be done now, children?" she said. "You have neither father nor mother, and your brother is a very young guardian, even if the court admit him as such; you three boys are provided for," (the President's letter regarding George met with a favorable response); "but the others,—what can be done with them? We must talk it over together, and, if I can be of any use, here I am."

Dietrich, with difficulty commanding himself, answered,—

"Aunt Ludovika has written to me. She is very sympathizing, and is much shocked that our position is not so affluent as she supposed; she regrets that her new ties render any efficient help impossible. But her husband has authorized her to take one of the children and educate it as her own."

"Well, then, why doesn't Bertha——" said the excitable old lady.

"She requests, therefore, that she may have Gertrude, or else Clärchen," said Dietrich, with an affectionate glance at his eldest sister.

"The smaller the children, the smaller the care," said Frau von Schöнау.

"Clärchen and Arthur are mine," I said, trembling lest the little couple should be divided. "They are mine. I promised your father not to part with them."

The children were playing around the room, utterly unconscious of what was going on. Dietrich came to my side, took both my hands and pressed them to his heart and to his lips, incapable of bringing out a word. Just then my eyes met little Gertrude's

pleading ones, full of the beseeching question, "Will you let me go?" and my resolution was quickly taken.

"Fräulein Bricks will get Gertrude a free scholarship in her old academy; they educate young girls for governesses there," said Frau von Schönau; "but I think that would do better for Bertha. She has more head for learning. Gertrude is a little home-body. If she chooses, she can come with me. I have not much; but it is enough for two, and she will do me the trifling kindnesses I require."

"They are actually quarreling over *you*," said Bertha; but, repenting the bitter speech, she went to the child and kissed her passionately.

"Gertrude a governess?" I said. "After awhile, perhaps; but just now she must help me with the little ones. Will you, Gertrude? will you come to me?"

She threw herself into my arms, and clung to me as though she feared lest she should be forced away.

"She has decided," said the old lady. "No one has a word to say; but I am sorry. I wanted the little monkey. But it is best so. Every well-wisher of the children will be glad to see them in your hands. I will speak to Fräulein Bricks about Bertha; or, Bertha, dear, will you come to me?" she added, kindly. "I'm afraid you're too elegant for my backstairs, and too proud for the services I should ask of you. It is true that no one is too good for a simple life,—and a simple one may be a very happy one,—but I hoped greater things for you, Bertha, and only offer myself as a last resource, but in all good will and affection."

"No, no! I wish to be a burden to no one!" said she, struggling between grief and anger. "Send me to the governess-manufactory. It makes little difference how one gets through with life!"

Suddenly I saw, and for the first time fully, how hard a task it would be to guide and direct such a character; but, just as quickly, I felt that it was a duty to undertake it.

"Bertha," I said, putting both arms around her, "we will try together to conquer the bitter, and to find the sweet that *is* to be found in every life. You four ought not to be parted; and I will do my best to prevent it."

I cannot describe the scene that followed: the children, large and small, hung upon me, embracing me, and covering me with kisses; their tears fell upon my face and hands, and the universal emotion ended in a gentle, happy laugh, the first for many a day, as Frau von Schöнау said, in her blunt way,—

"Why, you're a perfect ogress for children; you keep all the nice ones for yourself, and won't let any one have even a bite. Well, I at least shall come and look on, and perhaps I may be allowed to add a few spices or something of the sort.

"George," she continued, turning to the cadet, "I shall see to your pocket-money; and you big boys, —especially you, Joachim the scapegrace,—never, when you are in need, forget No. 10 Kockstrasse, left-hand side. Do you hear? Your hand upon it!"

Joachim gave his hand, and a kiss, too, and even made a jesting reply.

Truly the clouds are rising, and the dawn is reddening in the sky. I suddenly have a family that promises plenty of care and plenty of pleasure; and even should I have the first and not the second, what difference does it make? Selfish cares are just as heavy; and eagerly-sought and egotistical enjoyment is the mere shadow of the joy we awake in others and which is reflected back to us. Man alone is nothing; only in association and co-operation with others is his strength.

I have had a long talk with Bertha. I told her I would take the responsibility of developing her character, and would promise to devote all my powers and all my energy to it. I told her that education was never finished, but that hers had not even arrived at that stage when one's own experience, in conjunction with observation and reflection, would suffice to carry it on; that she must think the matter over, and decide whether she would be willing to place full confidence in me, and, above all, to give me her heart, for it is only a loving heart that can make good use of instructions.

"Be kind, and be firm, Hildegard," she answered, weeping; "I will thank you for both sincerely."

I trust her promise, and proceed, with good courage, to my self-imposed task. I have seen Bertha in many different humors, and in some very unamiable ones; but I must do her the justice to say that she never attempted to seem other than she really was, but talked and acted just as crossly or as affectionately as she felt; and this truth of nature is my greatest

hope. Only to true natures can we hold up a glass to delight or to shock them with their own faces. The false ones put on a pretty expression for the benefit of outsiders, and leave us in permanent doubt as to what they are really like.

I have held a council with my "major-domo" Caroline over our future housekeeping arrangements. She is delighted at my decision to keep the children. I know of a nice little house that I can get in the fall. Joachim will leave, then, for the university. Gertrude will continue to attend school. The little ones I will teach, and Bertha will try to study usefulness in the household, as well as book-learning. We will live in the good old-fashioned style. Luxury we could not have, even if we wished it. And though we will not spin the linen ourselves, we will cut it out and make it up; and in our little home true housewifely pride shall dazzle the guest with spotless neatness. Yes, the guest; for although I am an enemy of dissipation and frivolous gayety, yet my door shall never be closed against my friends. But all that will arrange itself; and just according as we tune the young mind now will the song of after-years be true or false. Heaven grant that it be a cheerful one, ringing forth from sound, strong hearts! One word, however, I shall strike out of my dictionary,—that is "fashion,"—and place in its stead good sense and modesty. Two others, now too often parted, shall be restored to their old connection,—duty and pleasure; and thus——

CONCLUSION.

"FRÄULEIN HILDEGARD!" cried Caroline, throwing open the door. Hildegard turned her head, dropped her pen, and, with a joyful cry, hastened to greet the new-comer.

"My dear, dear Count!" she cried; and, seizing his hand, she was about to raise it to her lips, when he bent down and warmly and affectionately kissed her forehead. "Am I dreaming? What brought you here?" she exclaimed.

"I will tell you that presently," he said. "But, first, how are you, and how are the poor children? You never called on me for assistance, Hildegard. That was not kind of you."

"You gave me your help without my asking for it," she said, gratefully.

"We won't talk about that," he said. Caroline, meantime, had moved up the arm-chair and placed soft cushions for his foot. He sat down, but pushed the cushions laughingly aside.

"Thank you," he said; "but I am an invalid only in winter."

How handsome he looked,—the noble old man, with his dignified bearing, and his own cheerful nature beaming forth from his bright, dark eyes!

From the bronzed cheek all its former paleness had disappeared.

"You have grown younger!" cried Hildegard.

"You too; in spite of all you have been through, you look well and happy," he answered.

"I have been born to a new life," she said, significantly.

A strange expression flitted across his face, as if he were about to apply the speech to himself also.

Hildegard took his hand.

"I have kissed it a thousand times in spirit," she said, raising it so suddenly to her lips that he could not prevent her, "and now you must let me do so in reality. As I guessed the name of the unknown benefactor, I have a right to thank him; and I will answer for it that his help has not been bestowed on an unworthy object."

Count Düsterloh laughed astutely.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "dear Hildegard, for not having placed perfect trust in your judgment in this point. I, of course, have every confidence in your experience and perception; but what does a lady know of a young man's life? What can she know of it? So I was afraid to rely upon a woman's decision in such a case; and, as I had particular reasons for desiring to know more about our friend Dietrich, I sent my steward."

"Then I was not mistaken," cried Hildegard.

"No," replied the Count, smiling. "The old man is well known here; and, besides, he always fulfils such commissions admirably. So he made inquiry;

and I need only tell you that you were perfectly right in your estimation of Dietrich von Löben. Everything showed that he was not unworthy of your championship. Herz, the banker, is an old friend of mine, and did me the favor of playing the part I assigned him; but, remember, you have promised not to betray me."

Hildegard nodded.

"And now," he said, "tell me the contents of the letter which, I see, I interrupted."

Hildegard complied. But how much more potent is the spoken than the written word! Deeply was the Count touched at her description of recent events; and she herself seemed to live over, as she spoke, all the heartache and all the pain, relieved by traits of childish affection, fraternal self-sacrifice, and growing force and nobleness of nature. When she had finished, the Count said,—

"I will not praise you, Hildegard; that which we do from good feeling does not require the spur of praise; but I will blame you. For the first time in your life you have egotistically forgotten your friend. You know why I did not before offer you a home in my house; now, with all my heart, I do offer it both to you and to the children. You have awakened in me a lively interest in them; you have drawn me on, step by step, into your new life, and now I beg for my share of responsibility in the fate and fortunes of these children who have grown so dear to me."

Hildegard looked at him, surprised at first, but then, with a saddened manner,—

"Alas!" she said, "I have only enough to start them on the way; the rest of the journey they must make for themselves; but, if the rich Count Düsterloh become their protector, there is danger that in the consciousness of such a guardian they will forget their own reduced circumstances, and return to their old ways again."

"You mistake me, Hildegard," he answered; "my property has nothing to do with this matter, for, as you know, it is entailed. I simply offer the aid of my experience, and will only give such assistance as you require. I have purchased from Aunt Ludovika the estate of Löbenau."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hildegard, with brightening eyes.

"It has been ill managed; he to whom I give it, either before or after my death, will have plenty to do to bring it back to proper condition. It will require labor. I have a most admirable overseer, and thought of proposing to Dietrich to continue his studies under his direction. I will not interfere with the generous plan dictated by brotherly affection. Let them help each other and themselves; I will stand aside; and, when aid is needed which you cannot furnish, then I will be ready, first with advice, and, if necessary, with something more substantial. Hildegard," he continued, more gravely,—and his tone grew almost reproachful,—"the goods of this world are one of God's gifts, and it is our duty not to despise, but to make good use of them. Their real value is the same in all ages; over-estimation of them is one of the fashionable crimes which goes

hand in hand with the exaggerated and absurd thoughts, opinions, and requirements that are the distinguishing traits of modern society. You know my house, my life, myself; am I a votary of fashion?"

She smiled, and declared herself vanquished, but said, almost hesitatingly,—

"Dietrich and Joachim are no longer children. Gratitude is not a degrading feeling, but still one feels a natural hesitancy at being under obligations to a stranger. They do not look on me as such; but you——" She paused.

"Perhaps I can relieve your mind on this point also. Will you introduce me to your *protégés*?"

Hildegard rose, and they went to seek the orphans.

"My old and valued friend Count Düsterloh," said Hildegard, as she entered, presenting him to each of the children in turn.

"The picture! the picture!" whispered Bertha, grasping Hildegard's hand convulsively; but she did not comprehend her.

When Arthur had made his best bow, and Clärchen had given her little hand to the old man, he said, simply,—

"Children, I am your uncle, the brother of your grandmother."

"I knew it!" cried Bertha, throwing herself into his open arms.

Hildegard was as surprised and as delighted as the young girl herself.

"By your means," said the Count, turning towards her, "a heavy shadow has been lifted from my

life. Mutual injustice and mutual rancor are lost in love."

The orphans felt as though they had found a father. The earth lay on the hearts that had loved them so dearly, and now in this stranger-relation came one to take the vacant place. The feeling that the same blood flows in the veins makes a great difference; it banishes all idea of strangeness, and gives, from the very beginning, a sympathy that otherwise would probably be the result only of long acquaintance. Besides, the Count, with all his dignity, had something about him which inspired confidence. In half an hour he was as much at home with his nephews and nieces as if he had known them all their lives; and the sorrow that still lingered amidst their joy ripened still more quickly the fruit of mutual affection. Just in the midst of this family scene Aunt Schöнау entered.

"For pity's sake, hold your tongues, and don't all speak at once," she said, as each one rushed forward to tell the news.

The gratitude was deep and sincere. They all insisted on knowing what part Hildegard had borne in bringing about this joyful meeting, and Bertha went to get the picture.

"Which you confiscated?" asked the Count, laughing.

Hildegard now readily recognized the well-known features, and only wondered how she could have been so blind.

"I knew it by the expression, and by the eyes,"

said Bertha, triumphantly, and with a trace of her old vivacity.

"I imagine from your recognition that we must be kindred spirits," said the Count, smiling; "so I want to know if you will not be my daughter. I think I have heard," and he cast a laughing glance at the young girl, "that old men like to have young girls for pets; will you be mine?"

Bertha's eyes lighted up; but, putting her arm around Hildegard, she said, resolutely,—

"No one wanted me, and she took me; I cannot part from her. And, besides," she continued, with something of her old bitterness, "I will be no one's pet. It is to play the part of a lapdog, who is thrust aside when he is not as amusing and as frolicsome as usual."

The Count, as well as Hildegard, understood the thought that dictated the remark.

"Well, as my request is rejected, I must turn my wishes elsewhere," said the Count, stroking Bertha's dark hair, as she kissed his hand tenderly, as if to apologize for the refusal. "Then, will you all be my wards, except Dietrich, who no longer requires a guardian, and who perhaps will accept me as an old and experienced friend? If so, as your guardian I have the right to settle your future place of residence,—that is, if I can gain the consent of your best and truest friend," pointing to Hildegard; then, turning to Bertha, he continued, "Will you come, if she bring you, and if your home be that of your brothers and sisters also?"

The reply was a many-voiced and yet a silent one. Happy tears and smiles answered him. In the hearts and in the faces of the children was such a struggle as is seen after a night of storm, the clouds melting away in transparent whiteness, and there, where a spot of azure is peeping through, a star of hope beaming amidst the darkness.

“The God of old still reigns!” said Frau von Schöнау. “Children, live to his honor!”

And so it was all arranged. Not to the little house in town, but to Count Düsterloh’s castle, did Hildegard go with her charges, and there they found a new and a happy home,—the little ones a protection from the swelling waves; the older ones, who were now to put to sea, a safe harbor. The noble nature of their uncle, Hildegard’s strong common sense and kindly heart, their own stormy experiences, with their happy results,—these are the beacons that show them the right path and save them from shipwreck, by casting their truthful light upon the cliffs and whirlpools of life, the shallows of vapid aspirations, the quicksands of exaggerated, unfounded pretensions, and of pitiful, egotistical struggles; in short, upon the whole wretched “humbug” of fashionable life.

Let us sink in darkness these unreasonable weaknesses. Away with vanity and worldliness, meretricious show and hollow pleasures! Down with the lofty, ill-built, highly-varnished dwellings! On the firm and time-honored old foundations, let us raise in their place the *Home* (the centre of womanly

duty and manly happiness, the holy temple of peace to all those who cross its threshold), as a symbol of the home that awaits us all, the "house not made with hands." Let that love which is the only true leveler reign in the hearts of its members, and it will stand firm through prosperity and adversity, while past it sweeps the motley masquerade of changing Fashion!

THE END.

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